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VOLUME 11

MAY, 1960

NUMBER 2

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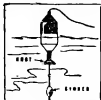
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The Corianis

Disaster

Novelet

by Murray Leinster

The Corianis was traveling between the planets Kholar and Maninea, and she was carrying the Planetary President of Maninea and important political figures from Kholar. Jack Bedell knew at once that something was wrong when he found he could see the stars at a time when they were supposed to be in overdrive. But the disaster really shaped up when they apparently reached their destination!

WHEN THE *Corianis* vanished in space between Kholar and Maninea, she was missed at once, which was distinctly unusual. Jack Bedell was aboard her at the time, but his presence had nothing to do with it; it was pure chance. Ordinarily a ship is missed only when her follow-up papers, carried from her port of departure by another ship, arrive at her port of destination and say that she

left at such-and-such a time, bound for the place where she didn't arrive. This can be a surprisingly long time later.

But in the case of the *Corianis*, there was no time lost. The Planetary President of Maninea had paid a state visit to Kholar for the beginning of negotiations for a trade-treaty between the two neighbor worlds. Now he headed back home on the *Corianis*, which was chartered for the trip. Im-

Women talked in consternation to their counterparts on the other ship.



ortant political figures of
holar accompanied him to try
finish the trade-treaty job
Maninea. It was a charm-
g picture of interplanetary po-
tical cordiality, and Jack Be-
ell got passage by accident.
was a short hop anyhow—
irely six light-years—calling

for two days in overdrive. Then,
the day after the *Corianis'* de-
parture, a political storm blew
up in the Planetary Congress
of Kholar, and a second ship
was chartered to follow and
give new and contradictory in-
structions to the Kholarian ne-
gotiators. So the second ship ar-

rived less than two days after the *Corianis* should have touched ground. Only, the *Corianis* hadn't; it had vanished in space.

FROM ANY viewpoint, it was a nasty business. There was a limit to the distance at which ships could communicate in space, and there was a limit to the speed of radiation by which a distress signal could be sent; the combination was depressing. Call a light-second an inch: then six light-years is thirty-six miles. In this frame of reference, a ship like the *Corianis*—a big one—is smaller than a virus particle; and if something happens to it on a two-day run, the job of finding it is strictly comparable to finding one lost virus-particle on several dozen miles of highway, with only a very few other motes able to move around and look for it.

It was an extra-nasty bit of business, too, because the Planetary President of Maninea was on board, accompanied by the Minister of State of Kholar; the Minister of Commerce of Kholar—the Speaker of the Planetary Senate, of Maninea;

the Chairman of the Lower House Committee on Extra-Planetary Affairs, of Kholar; and a thronging assortment of assistants, aides, secretaries, wives, children, and servants. They were all settled down for the journey when Jack Bedell diffidently applied for passage. Somebody misunderstood, and thought him part of the two official parties; he got on board less than ten minutes before take-off.

He wasn't important; he was only a mathematical physicist. When the *Corianis* was realized to be missing, people worried about the more important people and felt badly about the women and children. Nobody was disturbed about Bedell, but the *Corianis* needed to be found and helped in her emergency. Nobody had ever yet located a ship once vanished in space, but the *Corianis* was remarkably well-found, with special devices for distress-signals. She might be located.

II

NATURALLY, when she lifted off there was no faintest hint of dis-

aster ahead for the *Corianis*. She was a huge ship and licensed for journeys of any length within the galaxy. On the Kholar City space-port she towered twenty-five storeys high, and was at least as much in diameter. She was an imposing spectacle as she waited for the clear-to-rise signal. When she rose, she was even more stately.

She lifted at 4:11 Kholar City time. In two minutes, the sky outside her ports was dark. In four minutes, stars appeared and automatic shutters cut off the burning light of the local sun. In twelve minutes, she was well out of atmosphere and merely a speck of dazzling sunlight reflected down to those who watched her departure. She was an artificial star, visible in daylight. She went on out and out and out for some tens of thousands of miles, then she swung slightly about some inner axis; she steadied.

She flicked instantaneously out of sight as her overdrive field sprang into being, and drove for the Maninean solar system at some hundreds of

times the speed of light. By the nature of the structured field about her, the *Corianis* could not remain stationary. Wherever the field was, the fact of being there was intolerable. It acted as if it, and all its contents, were possessed of a negative inertia, so that enormous energy would be needed to hold it still. The theory of the overdrive field was not fully understood, but the best guess was that it partly neutralized those cosmic forces which tend to keep things as they are, and what they are, and where they are. Nobody knew just how delicate the balance of such forces might be, but the overdrive field worked.

ANYHOW, the *Corianis* translated herself from one place to another with a celerity that was unthinkable. She did not so much move through space as exist for infinitesimal parts of a second in a series of places where she could not continue to exist. Yet she was safe enough. Since two things cannot be in the same place at the same time, the

Corianis could not come to be in a place where there was something else; she could not collide with a meteor, for example. If one existed at the spot where she should be a single one-millionth-of-a-second ahead—why—she skipped that space and existed temporarily where otherwise she would have been two one-millionths-of-a-second in the future. There were limits to the process, to be sure; it was doubtful as to how far a ship in overdrive could skip; it would not be wise to risk collision with a sun, or even a small planet. But such a thing had never been known to happen.

So the big ship seemed to float, utterly tranquil, in her bubble of modified space, while actually she changed her position with relation to the planet she'd left at the rate of some seven hundred fifty thousand million miles per hour. She was divided into dozens of compartments with separate air-systems and food-supplies for each, and she had two overdrive units—one a spare—and she was equipped with everything that could make for safe-

ty. If any ship should have made the journey from Kholar to Maninea without incident, that ship was the *Corianis*. It seemed that nothing less than a special intervention of cosmic ill-will could possibly do her any harm.

THE CAUSE of her disaster, however, was pure blind chance. It was as unreasonable as the presence of Jack Bedell among her passengers. He was a small man with a thoughtful expression and a diffident manner. To a few men working in extremely abstruse research, Bedell was a man to be regarded with respect. But he was almost painfully shy; to an average secretary to an assistant under-secretary he was unimpressive. He was on the *Corianis* because a man he'd gone to Kholar to consult had stepped in front of a speeding ground-car the day before his arrival in Kholar City, and there was no reason for him to stay there. The whole thing was accident.

The disaster to the *Corianis* was at least as unreasonable.

Something of the sort had to happen some time or another, but it didn't have to be the *Corianis*—and it didn't have to be the particular mass of planetary debris it was.

For the first twenty-seven hours of her journey, the state of things aboardship was perfectly normal. The Planetary President of Maninea remained in his suite, except for a single formal appearance at dinner. The Minister of State of Kholar practised equal dignity. The Kholarian Minister of Commerce relaxed—which meant that he strolled through the public rooms and looked over the girl secretaries with a lecherously parental air. Other political figures did other things, none of them outstanding. Nurses took children to the children's diversion-rooms, and some were obediently diverted, while others howled and had to be taken back to their mothers. Jack Bedell wandered about, watching his fellow-passengers with interest, but much too shy to make acquaintances.

The time for sleep arrived—the time by Kholar City meridian, which the passengers

observed. It passed. The time for getting up arrived. It passed. The time for breakfast came around. It went by.

Bedell sat in a recreation-room, mildly watching his ship-companions, when the disaster took place. He was probably the only person in the passenger's part of the ship who noticed. The vanishing of the *Corianis* was not spectacular, to those who vanished with it.

The lights dimmed momentarily; there was the faintest possible jar. That was all.

III

FROM OUTSIDE, something visible did occur. True, the *Corianis* could not be seen; where she was, she existed for such immeasurably small fractions of a microsecond that she wouldn't have been visible even in the light of a close-crowding sun. But there was no sun hereabouts: the sun Kholar was a fourth-magnitude star back along the ship's course, the sun of Maninea was a third-magnitude star ahead. Here was only starlight.

It was very faint and unable to make anything seem brighter than the tiny glitterings of the galaxy's uncountable distant suns. Even if somebody had been hereabouts in a ship out of overdrive, it is unlikely that any warning would have appeared. Now and again a tiny pin-point of light winked out and on again. It couldn't have been observed; there were too many stars, and too few of them blinked out for too-short instants. But there was something out here.

It was debris—a clump of lumps of stone and metal, hurtling to nowhere. They were the fragments of a planet, broken to bits and thrown away through space by the explosion of a nova, like the one that formed the Crab Nebula. The explosion happened before men, back on Earth, had learned to warm themselves by camp-fires. The gas-nebula part of the explosion was long-since expanded to nothingness, but the fragments of a world went on. There were scraps of stone the size of pebbles, and lumps of metal the size of mountains.

Some floated alone, up to hundreds of miles from any other. But there was a loose mass of objects gathered together by their small gravitational fields, which was of the size but not the solidity of a minor moon.

ALL THESE objects flung onward as they had since the galaxies were closer and almost new. The moon-sized mass of clumped objects crossed the path along which the *Corianis* translated itself. The ship was invisible, the planetary debris undetectable.

There was a sudden, monstrous flare of light. It blazed frenziedly where the largest clump of fragments floated. It was an explosion more savage than any atomic explosion; it volatilized a quantity of metal equal to half the *Corianis'* mass. It jolted the few hundreds of cubic miles of celestial trash which had gathered into a clump. It made a flame of white-hot metal vapor ten miles in diameter, which in milliseconds expanded and dimmed, and in hundredths of a second had expanded so far that it did not even glow.

From a few thousand miles away, it would have looked like a fairly bright spark which went out immediately. From a few million, it would have seemed the temporary shining of a rather faint star. At a distance the *Corianis* would cover in three heartbeats, a naked eye could not have seen it at all. It was merely some few thousands of tons of metal turned to vapor and expanding furiously. Presently it would constitute a cloud of iron-and-nickel atoms floating in space—which would be unusual; there are calcium-clouds between the stars, and hydrogen clouds, but no iron-and-nickel ones. But this would be one.

The *Corianis* was gone.

IV.

BEDELL tensed a little where he sat in an easy-chair in a lounge on board the *Corianis*. The lights had blinked; there was a barely noticeable jar. In a partly-filled dining-room just beyond him, people continued with what might be either breakfast or lunch, depending on when

they got up. Those who sipped at drinks did not miss a drop. Jack Bedell gazed around him and automatically cocked an eye where speaker-units permitted warnings and information to be given to all the whole ship at once. But nothing happened. Nothing. In a city, perhaps, one might not notice if the electricity flickered, or if the floor bumped slightly; but in a ship in space such things are matters of importance.

After a little, Bedell stood up and moved toward the door of that particular room. He glanced along the corridor outside. Yes. At the end there was a view-port, closed now because the ship was in overdrive and there was nothing to be seen. But such ports were very popular among ship passengers at landing-time: they offered the thrill of seeing a world from hundreds, then scores, and then tens of miles as the ship went down to its landing.

A stout woman got in his way, and Bedell diffidently moved aside. He went on to the end of the corridor. There was a manual control by which the shutters outside the porch

could be opened. He took the handle to open them.

Someone said hesitantly, "Is—is that allowed?"

Bedell turned. It was a girl, a fellow-passenger. He'd noticed her. With the instinct of one who is shy himself, he'd known that she suffered, like himself, the unreasonable but real agonies of self-consciousness. She flushed as he looked at her.

"I—I just thought it might be—forbidden," she half-stammered.

"It's quite all right," he said warmly. "I've done it before, on other ships."

SHE STOOD stock-still and he knew she wished herself away; he'd felt that way, too. So he turned the handle and the shutters drew aside. Then he forgot the girl completely for a moment; his hair tried to stand on end.

Because he saw the stars. In overdrive, one does not see the stars; in mid-journey, one does not go out of overdrive. But the stars were visible now—more, there was an irregular blackness which shut out many of

them. It moved very slowly with relation to the ship. It was an object floating in emptiness. It could be small and very near, or farther away and many times the size of the *Corianis*.

There was another object, jagged and irregular. There were others. The *Corianis* was out of overdrive and in very bad company, something like three light-years from port.

He swallowed, and then moved aside.

"There are the stars," he told the girl. He very carefully kept his voice steady. "They're all the colors there are. Notice?"

She looked; and the firmament as seen from space is worth looking at. "Oh-h-h!" she cried. She forgot to be shy. "And that blackness. . ."

"It's the effect of the overdrive field," he said untruthfully.

She looked. She was carried away by the sight. She would undoubtedly find herself able to tell someone about it, and if there was an emergency—and there was—the fewer passengers who knew about it, the better.

She asked eager questions, and then she turned and looked at him and realized that she had been talking; she was embarrassed.

"Look!" said Bedelj uncomfortably. "I've done quite a lot of space-travel, but I—I find it hard to talk to people, though it's perfectly proper for fellow-passengers to talk. I'd be grateful..."

SHE HESITATED; but his diffidence was real. He'd spoken because she should not tell anyone that the ship was out of overdrive. Maybe—maybe—something could be done about it. And people who are shy can often talk together because they understand.

"I've trouble talking, too," she admitted.

"Then we'll find a place to sit down," he suggested.

Presently, inconspicuously, he wiped sweat off his forehead. The ship would be about halfway on its journey. If it made a signal, and if the signal could reach so far, it would reach the two nearest planets some three years from now, when the *Corianis* was forgot-

ten. There were other resources, but they depended on the ship being missed right away. That wasn't likely.

So he talked to the girl. Her name was Kathy Sanders. She was secretary to an assistant to the Secretary of Commerce.

When they separated, he thought of something.

"Now, why the hell didn't I remember that a passenger ship has to have a spare overdrive unit?" he demanded of himself. "How silly can I get? Everything's all right. It must be!"

But it wasn't.

V

THE *CORIANIS* lay dead in space. Dark objects floated about her; they were lumps, bits, masses, mountain-sized things which millions of years before had been part of a planet.

There'd been only the skipper and the first officer and a quartermaster in the control-room when the disaster happened. Utterly without warning of any sort, the overdrive unit bucked and roaring arcs leaped and crackled; the overdrive

unit turned to scrap metal in less than seconds. The brownish, featureless haze outside the unshuttered ports vanished. There were myriads of stars—and objects. Something the size of a mountain-range turned slowly, off to one side of the ship. Innumerable other floating things hung suspended on every hand.

Save for the arcs—and they were momentary—there was no sound. There was a jar from the bucking of the unit before it slumped into melted metal, but there was no flash of flame—no explosion of any sort. Yet the ship which had moved at the rate of three-quarters of a trillion miles per hour was still, and the first officer gaped stupidly out the ports, and the quartermaster began to shake visibly where he stood.

This was while the *Corianis* lay dead in space. But the skipper sprang across the control-room. He flipped on the ship's radars and swung the control which would warm up the planetary drive, normally used only for lifting from a space-port and for landing. The radars began to register. The *Corianis*

was within miles of a floating rock-and-metal continent which existed in emptiness. She was within tens of miles of hundreds of bits of cosmic junk, ranging from the size of sand-grains to that of houses. Within hundreds of miles, there were thousands of floating dangers.

THE "READY" light for planetary drive glowed green. The skipper jerked the lever to minimum power; the ship gathered way. He steered her clear of the nearest dangers. Below, the engine-room crew matter-of-factly cut away the wrecked drive-unit and began to braze the spare to functioning connection.

Time passed. The skipper, sweating, navigated the *Corianis* among the leisurely, rolling, gigantic things which could crush the ship's hull like an eggshell. It took him hours to get to where he dared use more than a quarter-gravity drive. It was more hours before he dared use half-gravity. Many hours passed before the radars promised safety if he went again into overdrive.

When the brown haze set-

tled before the control-room ports once more, the skipper was jumpy; the ship would be at least ten hours late to Maninea. The skipper let his third officer make the announcement over the public-address system. He couldn't do it himself; his throat clicked spasmodically shut when he tried to talk.

The *Corianis* should have been destroyed! She should have gone out of existence in a monstrous gout of flame; by this instant she should be no more than a cloud of vapor-fine particles, floating in emptiness. She had hit an enormous mass of planetary wreckage while speeding faster than light; she had hit a solid object she could not skip beyond. She had burned out her overdrive in what could only have been a collision! But it was not conceivable that the ship would remain as she was, solid and unstrained, after a collision with a continent of metal out between the stars.

THE SKIPPER knew he couldn't be alive. He had a strange, numb conviction that he was a ghost, and the ship

and all on board her with him. Despite this belief, however, he was excessively cautious in his approach to Maninea. Ordinarily he'd have come out of overdrive for a corrective sight something over a minute short of estimated time of arrival; a thousand thousand million miles is leeway enough for anybody. But the skipper cut overdrive three hours short of arrival, and an hour, and twice more before he went on interplanetary drive again and called down hoarsely for permission to land. The *Corianis* was more than thirteen hours late.

Even so, she didn't land immediately. Instead of getting clearance in forty-five seconds, it required more than an hour to get permission to descend. There was confusion aground; there was argument; there was acute apprehension and flat disbelief and the deepest of deep suspicion. When the *Corianis* did settle on the spaceport tarmac, there was hysteria.

Because the *Corianis*—at least a *Corianis*—was already aground. She had landed on Maninea just forty-seven hours thirteen minutes after lifting

off from Kholar. She had brought home the Planetary President of Maninea, the Speaker of the Senate of Maninea, and various persons dependent upon them. She had also brought the Minister of State for Kholar, the Minister of Commerce, the Chairman of the Lower House Committee on Extra-Planetary affairs, and a mass of aides, assistants, secretaries, wives, children, and servants. The ship itself was still aground at the spaceport.

WHEN THE *Corianis* landed — the *Corianis* with a burned-out drive-unit — she settled down beside herself. There were two *Corianis*. There were two Planetary Presidents of Maninea. There were also two Speakers of the Senate, two Ministers of State for Kholar, two Ministers of Commerce, two Chairmen of the Lower House Committee, and two of very nearly everybody else who'd sailed from Kholar. And the twos, the twins, the sets, the pairs of individuals, were not merely as much alike as two peas are like each other. They were as much alike as a

pea is to itself. They were exactly alike.

It was quite impossible. It was utterly impossible.

But it was even more embarrassing.

VI

BARELY a day after the departure of the *Corianis* from Kholar, a hastily-chartered mail-ship lifted off to carry corrected instructions to the emissaries negotiating a trade-treaty on Maninea. This other ship went out some twenty thousand miles from the planet Kholar, winked into overdrive, stayed in overdrive with its position relative to Kholar changing at the rate of seven hundred fifty thousand million miles per hour, and arrived at the Maninean solar system on schedule and without incident. But the *Corianis* had not arrived before her. The *Corianis* was overdue. There had been a disaster; the *Corianis* was missing.

The shipping-service force on Maninea tore its collective hair. There was a ship aground, taking off for Ghalt. It carried

away with it a plea from the shipping service for ships to help hunt for the missing *Corianis*. The mail-ship sped back to Kholar; it carried a plea for aid in the urgently necessary search. Meanwhile, Maninea would take all possible measures. Kholar would do the same.

The main reason for hope, about the *Corianis*, was that she carried on board the very latest distress-signal system for ships of her size and class. She carried a rocket which could drive some thousands of miles away from a disabled ship, and then detonate a fission-type atomic bomb. The rocket was of iron, which would be volatilized by the explosion. It would be spread as a cloud of iron particles in space. In less than a week the infinitesimally thin cloud should spread to a million miles. In a month it would be a sizeable patch of vapor. It would be thinner than an ordinary hard vacuum, but it could be detected. In six months it would still be detectable, and it would cover an almost certainly observable area of a spectrotlescope's field be-

tween Kholar and Maninea.

THE POINT was that there are no iron-atom clouds in space. Should one appear it would have to be artificial and hence a distress-signal. In the case of the *Corianis*, her course was known; one could know along what line to look for an appeal for aid.

So, immediately, the shipping-service force on Maninea sent up a space lifeboat with a spectrotlescope on board. It would look for an iron cloud in space along the line to Kholar. The evidence for such a cloud would be the fact that it absorbed iron-spectrum frequencies from the starlight passing through it.

If the *Corianis* set off her signal-bomb a mere one hundred sixteen thousand thousand million miles from Maninea, the cloud could be detected within a week. If it were set off farther away, its detection would be delayed. But ships to search had been asked for; when they came, they'd follow the *Corianis'* course back toward Kholar, stopping to look for iron-clouds every few light-

days along the way. They'd pick up an artificial cloud of iron vapor long before light passing through it could get to either planet.

So the shipping-service forces hoped. The job of finding one space-ship on a sight-light-year course, with possible errors in all three dimensions—it wasn't an easy one. But if the shipping service did find the *Corianis*, it could feel proud.

But it didn't. It only found out where the *Corianis* had vanished.

VII

THE *CORIANIS'* loud-speaker system belled, demanding attention. An agitated voice tried to explain to the passengers why they must remain on board for the time being. There was now in port—in fact right next to the *Corianis*—another ship of the same name and same design and same interior and exterior fitting. That other ship had brought passengers to Maninea who had claimed to be, and been believed to be, the persons the *Corianis* brought.

Somebody who claimed to be the Planetary President had been on that other ship. Naturally, there was concern when a second claimant to that identity and office appeared. There'd been a Minister of State from Kholar on the other vessel. And a Speaker of the Senate, and a Chairman of a Lower House Committee and—in short—a person claiming to be nearly everybody down to the smallest child on board the ship.

The passengers on the *Corianis* erupted in indignation. Everybody knew who *he* was! It was ridiculous to ask him to stay on board while the identification of the other person claiming to be him was investigated! That other person was an imposter! He was a scoundrel! Clap him in jail and.

Jack Bedell was possibly the only person on board the *Corianis* who really tried to make sense of the agitated words from the public-address system. The others seethed and growled and roared their resentment; he listened.

His expression changed from

astonishment to incredulity, and then much later to a very great thoughtfulness. Kathy watched his face as bewilderment and uneasiness increased in her.

"It's official!" he said presently, almost in awe. "And no politician would dare try to make anybody believe such a thing! It's panic—pure, unimaginative panic that makes them admit it!"

KATHY swallowed. "I can—imagine one person impersonating somebody else," she said uneasily. "But a lot of people—a shipload! And—the President of the planet? How could anybody impersonate him? Too many people know him too well!—Couldn't they be crazy to suspect us of being imposters?"

Bedell shook his head. "Delusions have a sort of cockeyed logic to them," he told her. "Nothing is as crazy as facts. I believe this. Reality can always outguess imagination!"

She looked at him, bewildered and uneasy.

"I've forgotten the figures," he added, "but the odds are

billions to one against any person having the same fingerprints as any other member of the human race since time began. Of course, two in a generation is unthinkable. And here we've got scores of identical-fingerprint pairs of people turning up! The odds against it—oh, nobody will believe it!"

"But it can't be true, can it?" asked Kathy uncomfortably. She'd felt more comfortable, talking to Bedell, than she'd ever felt with anybody else. She hoped he felt the same way.

"Oh, it's probably true," said Bedell. "It's just impossible. That's always upsetting... Let's get some lunch and think about it."

They moved past corridors full of people who had been prepared to leave the ship and now were forbidden to do so. They were infuriated; they were insulted.

"Leaving aside the impossibility of the thing," observed Bedell as he and Kathy seated themselves in one of the ship's dining-saloons, "there are some other angles. There are two *Planetary Presidents. Which is*

which? There are two Ministers of State for Kholar. The duplication runs all down the line. I wonder if there's another me on board that other ship! I'd guess that the odds are less than for most people. And I wonder if there's another you."

KATHY started. She turned pale. "Nobody'd have reason to impersonate me!" she protested. But she was frightened. "Anyhow t h a t—that couldn't be!"

Jack Bedell shrugged, but he smiled at her, reassuringly. They saw a waiter, but no one came to serve them. Presently other passengers came into the dining-room, talking indignantlly of the affront of suspecting them 'of being fakes.

Strangers in uniform moved past the doorway of the dining-saloon. A pompous figure, the Minister of State, stood splendidly in their way. He addressed them as if they were voters, his voice rolling and sonorous and angry. He oratorically protested the outrage of doubting his identity. It would be resented! There would be retaliation! An

apology was in order, and an immediate withdrawal of the order forbidding him to land...

The strangers walked around him and moved on. A bewildered man in ship's uniform led the way.

"They're going to the purser's office," said Bedell, nodding his head. "They'll take the passenger-list to compare with the other *Corianis*' list of people on board. Of course the local problem is that their president exists in two copies. That will upset the whole planetary government."

"You—seem to know what's going on," said Kathy, uneasily.

"I don't," Bedell told her. "But there's such a thing as a universe of discourse—an acceptance of the preposterous so you can arrive at sense. *If* it's true that there are doubles of almost everybody, alike even to fingerprints—why—such-and-such other things must be true, also. But not even in a universe of discourse would absolutely everybody on both ships be absolutely alike! There'd have to be some exceptions! How long have you

been the secretary of somebody who would naturally want you on this trade-treaty trip?"

SHE LICKED her lips. She was scared; the idea of another, independent version of herself, knowing everything she knew, capable of anything she could do, but not under her control.

"I've had my job three months," she said. "Before that. "

"The chances are good that you're unique," said Bedell, "if the universe of discourse I'm thinking of is valid."

The men in strange uniforms went back past the dining-saloon door. They were followed by the Speaker of the Senate of Maninea. He expostulated furiously. The men in the strange uniforms looked hunted and upset. They still had the ship's purser with them.

"I think," said Bedell, "that this is going to go pretty far. How'd you like to look out a port at this lunatic world which says we can't be ourselves because somebody else is us?"

He led the way—Kathy trembling—down two levels to

where nobody crowded the corridors. It was quite silent, here. Someone had turned off the thread-thin whisper of music which prevented ghastly silence on the ship while in flight. They went to the end of a corridor. Bedell cranked open the shutters of a port. They looked out.

They were in the *Corianis*, but the *Corianis* rested solidly aground two hundred yards away. The other ship was gigantic; it was solid. It was an absolutely perfect duplicate of the *Corianis* from which they looked. It was not the kind of object one could imagine as partaking of the impossible or the unreal. There was nothing ghostly about it; it was defiantly an actual thing.

BEDELL looked down at the spaceport's surface.

"There," he observed with careful calmness, "there's the purser—from this ship. And there's the other of him, over there. There are two of him, just as the loud-speakers said."

The men in strange uniforms had reached the spaceport tarmac with the *Corianis*' purser

in their midst. They now met another group of uniformed men with the *Corianis'* purser in their midst. The port from which Bedell and Kathy looked down was a good fifty feet high, but they could see perfectly. The purser just emerged from the ship was identical to the man already on the space-port ground. They were identical in height and weight and the fit of their uniforms. That was conceivable. But they moved alike; they carried themselves alike; they made the same gestures! It was insanely like seeing mirror-images making independent motions. One felt the same shocked incredulity.

Kathy pointed a shaking finger. "There's Mr. Brunn! My boss! But he's here on the ship! If—if there's—if I'm down there too. "

She searched for her own self among the figures down below, shaking with terror lest she might succeed.

A ground-car rolled out past the space-port buildings. It came to a halt below. Bedell recognized the man who stepped out; he was the Plan-

etary President. With him was the Kholarian Minister of State. Both of them happened—as Bedell knew very well—also to be on board the *Corianis* which had recently landed.

"Now I wonder," said Bedell meditatively, "if the President who got here first is going to try to face down the President who got here second! And if the Minister of State of Kholar is going to denounce his other self, who's foaming at the mouth at this instant on board this ship!"

ANOTHER ground-car arrived and disgorged dignified persons. The intention was clear; the head of the Maninean planetary government found himself accused of imposture. Somebody else claimed to be him. Lesser officials who had seen the claimant were uncertain and unsure. But the President knew who he was! With enormous dignity he came to confound the imposter who could bewilder his subordinates. Face-to-face, he was sure, there could be no doubt of who was who!

But Jack Bedell, staring from overhead, saw the confusion and then the terrific and undignified row which followed the discovery that it was hopeless—not only to know who was who, but which was which. Other ground-cars arrived, and the two identical Planetary Presidents of Maninea faced each other. They were backed by equally identical Ministers of State of Kholar, two identical Speakers of the Maninean Senate, two Chairmen of the Lower House Committee, and so on down to the utterly identical nurses—identical to fingerprints and eye-patterns—who tended the utterly identical children of identical assistant undersecretaries, and even to the identical undersecretaries' identical wives. And even the wives were identical to the very number and location of gray hairs in their heads caused by identical griefs caused by their identical husbands! Naturally, there was tumult.

It was a beautiful row, a stupendous one, and it settled nothing whatever. The governmental processes of an entire planet clanked to a halt pend-

ing the solution of the problem posed by the *Corianis'* tardy or over-hasty arrival. The government of another planet would be thrown into confusion as soon as this news reached it.

"I think," said Bedell, gazing down, "I think they're going to have to try something else. They'll never be able to settle the matter on objective evidence. They've just tried to act on the theory that two people can't be exactly alike—but it appears that they can be, and are. Now they'll try to find some people who aren't identical and study them to find out why not. I suspect that we may be called on, Kathy."

Kathy's teeth chattered.

"I—didn't see myself down there," she said shakily. "I—I don't want to! I'd—I think I'd hate her!"

Bedell looked surprised. Then his expression changed.

"Yes. I suppose one would. Hmmm... Simple, natural instincts like that will probably have a good deal to do with settling this business!"

AS THEY turned away from the port, loudspeakers clicked and everywhere over the ship the same voice was heard in innumerable echoings of the same words: "*Will the following passengers please go to the exit-port? Will the following passengers please go to the exit-port?*" There followed four names. One was Bedell's. One was Kathy's. Neither of them recognized the other two.

"This is good," said Bedell. "They hope to learn something from us because we came on the *Corianis* and we are nevertheless like everybody else on every other planet in the galaxy. We're peculiar. We are ourselves alone. We can feel proud."

But Kathy's teeth still chattered. Presently, in one of the spaceport offices a harried Maninean official looked at them with great though precarious self-control.

"Look here!" he said uneasily. "On both ships together there are just seven people who don't match up to the last pimple with somebody else. You're two of the seven. Can you ex-

plain why you aren't part of the business that is driving everybody crazy?"

Bedell found himself hesitating diffidently. Then he cursed himself for self-consciousness. He said mildly, "I got on the *Corianis* at the last minute—by accident. I wasn't really supposed to be on the ship. I imagine you'd say my presence is accidental. That might explain it."

The official said drearily, "The ship record says you're a mathematical physicist. Is there anybody on Maninea who might know you personally?"

"I think so," said Bedell. "There was a convention of astrophysicists on Hume, some years ago. I read a paper there. Some men from your astrophysical institute here will probably remember me."

"We'll check that," said the official. He seemed to brood. "This is the devil of a mess! The planetary vice-president has issued an executive order, keeping authority in his own hands until it's decided who is the real president. Both—both men who seem to be President have agreed to it, though both

of them are raging. The two Ministers of State from Kholar have agreed to hold up official conferences until things are straightened out. And we're sending a ship to Kholar with a report and records and memos from everybody on both ships, to see if they can solve it on Kholar. You aren't anybody's double. But do you want to send any message? Nobody claims to be you—or her."

KATHY licked her lips. Bedell frowned. "I think," he said thoughtfully, "that there'll be somebody back on Kholar who'll claim to be me. He'll be registered at the Grampion Hotel in Kholar City. He'll be waiting for a ship that will be coming here. He missed the *Corianis*. I'd like to write him a note."

"You wouldn't," said the Maninean official sardonically, "you wouldn't let sleeping doubles lie?"

"No," said Bedell. "I know him rather well. If he isn't there, it will be informative. If he answers, it will be more helpful still. And I think I can promise that he'll stay on Kho-

lar. He won't come here. I wouldn't. I don't think he will."

"It's nice that somebody believes he can arrange something helpful!" said the official bitterly. "I don't see a chance! Do you realize that every pair of doubles we've tested so far has had the same blood type and same RH factor and same immunity-antibodies in his blood at the same intensities? And they also have the same fingerprints and same teeth and same height and weight and metabolic readings? I'm getting so I talk to myself! If this keeps up I'll start answering back!"

"It could be worse," said Bedell, after consideration. "I don't think it likely, but there could be a third *Corianis*."

"Don't say it!" snapped the Maninean vehemently. "Don't say any more! I was relaxing, talking to a man from the *Corianis* that there's only one of! It felt good! Don't say any more!"

HE TURNED to Kathy. "Young lady," he said. "I'd like you to talk to another girl from the other *Corianis*."

She doesn't claim to be you, but she does claim to have the job of secretary to the same man. Will you see what you can find out about each other?"

"N-naturally," said Kathy.

The official pressed a button and said, "Ask her to come in, will you?"

He slumped back in his chair. Within seconds, a girl came in. She was nervous; she was jumpy. She looked relieved to see, in Kathy, somebody who didn't look in the least like herself.

"Miss Kossuth," said the official, "this is Miss Sanders. It seems that you've got something but not too much in common."

"Y-yes," said the girl from the first-arrived *Corianis*. "I'm Mr. Brunn's secretary. He's Assistant Undersecretary of Commerce."

"I'm Mr. Brunn's secretary, too," said Kathy. She moistened her lips. "Is his wife's name Amelie, and does he have three children—two boys and a girl?"

The girl from the first-arrived *Corianis* said uneasily,

"Y-yes. This is crazy! Is your Mr. Brunn rather fat, and does he fiddle with his ear when he's dictating?"

"Yes!" said Kathy. She looked appalled. "Does your Mr. Brunn have a picture of a baseball team on his desk?"

"Yes!" said the other girl. "Alton High School. He played second base."

"So did my Mr. Brunn," said Kathy. Then she added, "I—I've seen you before. I—know you. I'm sure of it!"

The first-arrived girl said helplessly, "I don't remember you. But at least we aren't doubles!"

KATHY swallowed. "But I remember you. You had the job I've got. You'd resigned to get married, three months ago, and you showed me about the work I was to do. You were going to marry a boy named Al Loomis. You said he was a draughtsman."

The first girl went ashen-white. "I m-married him? I—I. But I didn't! W-we had a quarrel and—broke up! How did you know? I never saw you before! I never told

you. How do you know all about my private affairs? How. "

The other girl from the other *Corianis* began to cry. She ran out of the room.

There was silence. Kathy turned unhappily to Bedell. He said encouragingly, "That was fine, Kathy! It clears up several points! You did splendidly!"

The official stirred. He said without hope, "I'm glad somebody's pleased!— If you've got a theory, don't tell me! Get it worked out and we'll have the Astrophysical Institute boys look you over and then we'll have whoever should pass on what you think pass on it. But I'd rather not hear it. I don't want to understand this business, because I don't want to believe it! But there's nobody claiming to be you, so far, so you can leave the *Corianis* if you choose to."

"No," said Bedell, "I think I'd better stay on the ship. This state of things should be unstable. I want to do some calculating from some books I have with me. . . But I would

like to talk to the Astrophysics people."

The official said drearily, "You sound like you think you know what's happened. It's all right with me if you stay aboard your ship. We're trying to keep the two sets of people apart, anyhow. Do you know what happens when duplicates see each other?"

"I can guess," said Bedell, "but I'd rather not. Come along, Kathy. Let's get back to the ship."

VIII

THE *CORIANIS* had vanished between Kholar and Maninea. After the fact was discovered, it took a mere few hours to get a space lifeboat out of atmosphere with a spectrotelescope on board, to watch for the iron-atom cloud in emptiness which would be a plea for aid, and only two days and a few hours were needed to get the news back to Kholar. On the way back, the mail-ship which took the news may have passed within light-hours of the spot where the *Corianis* had collided with a

celestial scrap-heap. But it was not equipped for search.

By the time the *Corianis* was four days overdue, a tramp-ship took off from Maninea; it also was equipped with a spectrotelescope. It began, methodically, to make short hops in overdrive along the line the *Corianis* should have followed. Each time it came out of overdrive it made a search. It searched from three light-days from Maninea, and six, and twelve, and so on. It did not really expect to pick up a distress-signal so early. An iron-atom cloud would be relatively small so soon after its presumed formation. But it would enlarge, and that fact that it would also thin out didn't matter.

That first hunting ship from Maninea reached Kholar. No news. It was joined by another ship which had come into port. The two ships spaced themselves some light-minutes apart and headed back for Maninea; they reached it without any discovery. Two other ships had arrived from other worlds in response to the shipping serv-

ice's request. Four ships headed back for Kholar.

EMPTY space is dark. The firmament glitters with innumerable stars, of all the colors that light can be; but the total light is faint, and where there is no sun it is very, very lonely. Each of the ships making multi-billion-mile casts through emptiness seemed utterly solitary. A ship came out of overdrive to unstressed space. It located the sun Kholar. It focussed a spectrotelescope upon a five-degree square area of space with Kholar at its center. It turned on the scope. Only stars with strong absorption-lines in their spectra would appear in the scope-field. They were examined separately. If or when one of them showed the lines slightly widened, it would indicate that iron existed between the star and the ship. Then there must be a cloud of iron particles in space—a signal of distress.

A little more than halfway across, a ship from Ghalt—the last ship to join in the search—found the telltale widening of iron-spectrum lines in the

light of Kholar itself. It aimed for the cloud and jumped for it. It over-leaped. It went back. It found the cloud—and danger-signals clanged inside it. The iron-atom cloud was then two and a half million miles in diameter. The ship sought its center; it found debris floating in space. It measured the iron-vapor cloud and computed its mass. There was too much vaporized metal to have come from a signal-rocket's substance; there was not enough to say that the *Corianis* itself had broken down to atoms.

THE SHIP began to examine all the debris its radars picked up. It found some rocky and many metallic masses; some were the size of houses. There was a dense cloud of larger metal lumps still. Its parts were in motion, as if it had only recently been jolted by something enormous.

The first ship was joined by a second, which also had found the iron-cloud. Later a third ship drove up and joined the search.

They did not find the *Cori-*

anis. They did find a mountain-sized mass of metal, on one of whose flanks there was a circular, hollow, glistening scar, as if some incredible blast of heat had burned or boiled away the metal there. Rough estimate suggested that the amount of metal boiled away at this spot might account for the metal-cloud.

It did. An analysis of the cloud's substance disclosed nickel in considerable quantity with the iron. A measurement of the cloud's expansion gave the time of its beginning to expand—it's creation.

The iron-cloud did not come from the *Corians'* hull or signal-rocket. It was not iron alone; it was a nickel-iron cloud. It was metal vaporized from a mass of metallic debris. It had been vaporized at the time the *Corianis* had passed through this part of emptiness. Here, then, was where the *Corianis* had vanished.

But there was no trace of the ship itself, though one or another of the three ships examined every particle of solid stuff within thousands of miles.

The search-ships, though, had done a remarkable job; they'd located the scene of a disaster in space. The ship involved could not be found—but to pinpoint even the place where a ship was wrecked was more than had ever been accomplished before.

IX

THE CONFUSION on Maninea already made for jumpiness. When a mail-ship came in from Kholar and called down for landing-permission, panic began. But this was not a third *Corianis*; it was an ordinary small mail-ship. It brought new and confidential instructions for the diplomatic party from Kholar.

The skipper of the mail-ship landed. He saw the *Corianis*, then he saw her duplicate. He did not believe his eyes. He had diplomatic mail for the Minister of State for Kholar. Shaking his head, he asked questions. He learned that there were two Ministers of State for Kholar hereabouts. He did not know to which he should deliver the diplomatic pouch. He

tried to find out from lesser officials—from Kholar. There were two Ministers of Commerce. There were two Chairman of the Lower House Committee on Extra-Planetary Affairs. There were two of everybody that had left Kholar. Everybody...

He learned of the gibbering mix-up that defied all possibility and all reason. He saw the armed guards placed to keep the two ships isolated from each other. He heard of the freak discovery of a criminal in the *Corianis'* crew. In the ordinary course of events this man—an oiler—would never have been detected; he had only to stay aboard-ship and nobody would pay any attention to him. But everybody on both *Corianis* had been fingerprinted. This murderer was identified by his fingerprints; the police wanted him badly.

But they didn't want two of them—which they had. He was taken from both ships and put in jail. The cells to which the two copies of one man were assigned happened to face each other. When a lawyer was ap-

pointed, he verified certain crucial items, and the crewmen in their cells howled with laughter.

TWO MEN, obviously, could not be punished for a crime that only one had committed. So far as any conceivable test could determine, these two men were identical; they were the same man. But they could not both be punished; they could not even be kept in jail. They would have to be freed, because there was no way to assign guilt to one rather than the other; both were the criminal meriting punishment.

The upsetting fact was that they could now go out and commit any conceivable crime—and provided only one had committed it, and they contrived to mix themselves together so that one couldn't be picked out, the law could not touch them.

The mail-skipper went back to Kholar for instructions. He carried a painstaking account of the confusion on Kholar, and carefully-written documents by each person involved,

claiming his identity and beseeching help to establish it past question. There was only one person whose letter was addressed to his own counterpart on Kholar; that was Jack Bedell. He wrote to a person of his own name in the Grampion Hotel; he was quite certain that he would receive informed and cheerful cooperation.

Two men from the Astrophysical Institute came to talk to Bedell on the *Corianis*. He was with Kathy when they arrived. The atmosphere in the ship was that of advanced neurosis, and Kathy could not bear the bright-eyed, indignant tension which led everybody to try to buttonhole everybody else and insist that they were who they had always been, and that their doubles were imposters and criminals. There is nothing more horrifying than to be uncertain who one is. And these people had faced other people who claimed their names and possessions and pasts, their personalities and their futures.

Kathy kept close to Bedell.

THE TALK with the astrophysicists, though, was technical to a degree that Kathy found impenetrable. The two spectacled men recognized Bedell. One of them remembered a conversation, on Hume three years before; they had no doubt of him. So they plunged into talk, and Kathy heard stray phrases. "*Obviously there could be no impact, but* " "*The effect is of replication, of course.*"— That was the shorter astrophysicist's contribution. Bedell demurred. "*Replication,*" he said carefully, "*implies the idea of folding. I don't think it's that. I think we have multiple reality with true simultaneity in the different sequences.*"

Kathy could make nothing of it. She stopped listening, though relatively simple terms like "trans-chronal" and "alternative presents" and "tangential displacement" followed and sounded as if they might mean something. She did notice with some surprise that presently they were talking absorbedly about the sacks of mail the two ships had brought with them.

The astrophysicists went away, still talking enthusiastically to each other. Bedell shrugged. "Maybe we'll work out something practical. They're going to try to get permission to read the mail."

"Why?" asked Kathy. She felt horribly stupid.

"We've agreed on a tentative hypothesis," he explained. "And it seems that the mail, like the people, should be almost but not quite identical in the two ships. Some letters will be exactly alike, but some should differ a little."

This, also, did not register with Kathy.

"What's tangential displacement?" she asked. "I felt so stupid!"

"It's what they're going to look for in the letters," said Bedell. "If the postal authorities permit it, they'll send some of it to me."

THE POSTAL authorities did permit. A creditable reaction had begun among the persons on Maninea actually concerned with the problem the duplication of the *Corianis* had produced. At first, the sheer,

stark impossibility of the facts made everybody's thinking chaotic. But the officials of the spaceport and the government developed a dogged, unhopeful, resolute point of view. This was no ordinary affair, but they would act as if it were. They would go through the motions of a normal investigation, using their brains as sanely as possible upon what had to be delusion. They were not sure that they would get anywhere; it did not seem that anybody could. But to act rationally about even a lunatic occurrence would be better than mere dithering or howling at the nearest of Maninea's two moons.

The head of the space-port police interviewed the skipper of the *Corianis*—one *Corianis*. His answers made sense; if there hadn't been a second *Corianis* in port he'd have made an excellent impression. He seemed a truthful and conscientious man. But then the same space-port officer interviewed the second skipper.

Academy on Ghalt?"

"Yes," said the skipper of the *Corianis*-with-the-burned-out overdrive.

"You were fourth officer on the *Ulysses*?"

"Yes."

"Third on the *Panurge* and second on the *Dhombula*?"

"Yes," said the skipper.

"You got your first command as recognition of your behavior in an emergency the *Dhombula* ran into on Astris IV?"

"No," said the skipper.

The spaceport officer looked at the record of the other talk. "It says here you did."

"I didn't," insisted the skipper. "I remember putting in to Astris IV while I was second on the *Dhombula*, but there wasn't any emergency."

The interviewer made a memo and observed, "You skippered the *Contessa*, the *Ellen Trent*, and the *Cassiopeia* before you took over the *Corianis*."

"No," said the skipper doggedly. "The *Cassiopeia* was my first command. I went from her to the *Corianis*."

The spaceport man chewed on his pencil "This happens

"YOU GRADUATED from the Merchant Space

all the time!" he said distastefully. "The other skipper—the other you, you might say—did nearly everything you've done. But not quite! Each two people who are absolutely identical make nearly identical statements, but never completely identical ones. It can be checked whether you skippered the *Contessa* and the *Ellen Trent*! We can find out whether you're stating the facts. But when you're identical in every way but a part of your professional history, why do you differ on that? And even if we find out one of you is wrong—what then? You'll still be identical!"

The skipper looked at him numbly.

"Haven't you any idea, however unlikely, to explain the—this mess?" demanded the official.

"I don't know what's happened," said the skipper in a dull voice, "unless I'm dead and in hell."

THE SPACEPORT man could have asked, "Why dead?" He might have gotten a suggestive answer. But in-

stead, he asked, "Why hell?"

The skipper said heavily, "I've got a wife and kids. He says they're his. I know they're mine. I've seen him. I don't know how to prove he isn't me! But I know he's not!—Do you think I'm going to let him go back to my family, and my wife not able to know he isn't me, and my kids thinking he's their father? Will I let that happen?"

His hands clenched and unclenched. The space-port official said very tiredly, "I give up, skipper. —Maybe you'll be interested to know that he said exactly what you just said, in nearly the same words and with apparently the same sincerity."

He waved a hand in dismissal, and then watched out the window of his office to make sure the skipper went back to his own ship and not the other. There'd been one deplorable incident. An aide to the Minister of Commerce had met his duplicate *and* his duplicate's wife while both were taking exercise between the two grounded ships, and there was very nearly a murder there and then. One of the two men

had made the trip alone, his wife having sprained her ankle two days before the take-off. The other had brought his wife along. She'd tripped, but not quite sprained her ankle.

The man who'd come alone went into a murderous rage when he saw his wife with the other man. She was living with the other man on the other *Corianis*! Openly! She was his wife and the other man was himself. The man who'd traveled alone tried desperately to kill his duplicate—who as determinedly tried to destroy him. The wife screamed in horror because she could not tell which of the two was her husband.

BUT NOT all minor non-correspondences produced so much emotion as, in that case, the fact that one woman had sprained her ankle while her duplicate had not. There was the mail. In some dozens of sacks from each *Corianis*, less than a score of letters were not twinned. In many cases the twin missives were exactly alike, down to the last and least and most unconsidered comma.

In others, a word or an occasional phrase differed from one counterpart to the other. One personal letter, however, mentioned in one copy that a certain person had died, and in the other copy that he had made an unexpected recovery.

Kathy said desperately, "But it's all so—so impossible! Things like this. I feel as if we'd all gone insane! We, and the people in the other ship, and the people on Maninea who believe in the people of the other ship—everybody!"

Bedell nodded. "Yes. It's like walking up to a big mirror, and suddenly you find that there isn't any glass there, and the people can walk out of the mirror—or maybe we've walked into it. We don't know."

"But it's—impossible!"

"Hmmm. " said Bedell. "There was a time when people thought you couldn't talk to anybody a mile away, and people couldn't fly, and nobody could travel faster than light. All these things are still impossible. You still can't do them. But you can do things that have the same consequences. We use those other

things as substitutes for things that can't happen. In a way, this apparently impossible state of things may be a substitute for something that couldn't happen."

"Such," demanded Kathy, "such as what?"

"Such as the wrecking of the *Corianis*," he suggested. "Maybe all this has happened as the alternative to the *Corianis* exploded to vapor from some collision, with all of us floating around as gas-particles in space."

Kathy didn't believe it. Still Bedell acted more like a sane man than anybody else on the *Corianis*. The nervous strain inside the ship was nerve-racking.

X

WHEN THE two *Corianis* had been aground for two weeks, the situation took a very nasty turn. At first, the ordinary citizens of Maninea accepted the problem of the two ships as a sort of sporting event. They assumed that daring and clever crooks had planned a massive

imposture, and that they'd been stymied by the appearance of the impersonatees. It seemed still more of a sporting event when the assumed frauds gallantly seemed to try to bluff it out; when they defied the police to unmask them. And when the police failed, the citizens of Maninea admired the imposters more than ever—but they were no longer certain which set of passengers were the frauds. So they waited for the scientists to make their tests and say, with confident certitude, that these persons were who they said they were, and these other persons were imposters.

But the scientists couldn't answer either.

That was a shock. It was a disappointment. It was frightening. For example, the newscasters found a man who'd been a schoolmate of the Planetary President when both of them were ten years old. He hadn't spoken to the President since. He would remember things that nobody but the President and himself could possibly know about. He could tell! The newscasters also

found a grandmother who—at seven—had made mud pies with the now Speaker of the Senate. Nobody could fool her!

THE TWO unimportant persons spoke, respectively, to the two claimants to the Planetary President's identity, and to the two men who claimed to be Speaker of the Senate. They came from their interviews shaking and unable to decide. Both Planetary Presidents remembered everything from the age of ten. They reminded their pre-presidential playmates of things that the playmates had forgotten. The woman who'd made mud pies with the Speaker of the Senate was positive after she'd spoken to only one. He'd reminded her of the spanking she got for using the morning milk to manufacture mud-pie pancakes. Only her old playmate knew about that! But the second copy of the Speaker of the Senate not only remembered it too, but described to her the funeral of a defunct mouse and the decoration of its grave. So he was her former playmate, too.

During the ships' third week aground the citizens of Mani-neia reacted violently. It seemed as if they suddenly realized that the natural order of things was defied, that something sneakingly suggestive of the supernatural was involved. When science could not reveal the mystery, the mystery might be beyond science. Rumors sprang up and flew about. Some were ominous; some were pure horror.

There was the rumor that devils out of hell had somehow escaped confinement and planned to move in among mankind and ultimately destroy it. Only a few people believed this.

There was the rumor that witches, by compact with the powers of evil, had become able to take forms other than their own. They would rule humanity; they would eventually enslave it. A larger number believed this.

THE MOST popular of the rumors had a touch of scientific imagination in it. One *Corianis* and the beings on board it, said this rumor, had

come from a remote and hidden world where there existed a race of monsters. They were non-human Things which could make even scientists believe them human. They could read human minds; they could take control of human bodies. They had come to Maninea to begin the extermination of humanity. And this rumor declared that the monsters could duplicate human bodies and that humans were being missed, about the space-port. Children had vanished; women had disappeared. The monsters who passed for men were anthropophagi. They devoured human flesh in orgies too horrible to be described, and then went out in the likeness of their victims to allure or seize on other victims.

Very many people accepted this idea and felt a growling, rumbling hatred for the two ships which could not be explained except by some such tale as this. And the fact that this story spread and spread brought denials. There were women who had sons and daughters in government service; they'd made the trip to Kholar and returned, but in

duplicate. Some of these women fiercely demanded to see their children. They'd know their flesh and blood!

But they didn't. A woman who'd had one son found that she had two. And she could not have two, but she did. Then there were women whose husbands were aboard the *Corianis*. They protested that they would know them! And they came to weep horribly because they could not know which of two burning-eyed, frantic men had been their husband before he went to Kholar.

Enmity to the *Corianis'* passengers became a thing to shudder over. Almost any man would agree that, in all probability, one of the two sets of human beings was human; but one was not. It was something more horrible than death, and it must be destroyed. If it could not be decided which was human and which was not—then, regretfully but remorselessly, all must die...

KATHY no longer made any attempt to mingle with the other passengers. She and Jack Bedell had been two retiring,

diffident, self-conscious people who found talk with other people absurdly difficult. Now the confined shipload of diplomats and political appointees was so nerve-racked that Kathy felt aloof rather than retiring; she was defensive instead of shy. And Bedell's manner had taken on a tinge of authority. He'd started to work with the men of the Astrophysical Institute, testing materials from the two ships in extreme conditions to find out some basic difference. Very soon it was unwise for Bedell to try to go from the spaceport to the Institute and back. Shortly after, it became even dangerous for the people at the Institute to come on board the ship. So they worked together with a vision-screen connection in being. As other approaches to the mystery proved hopeless, the research of which Bedell was the driving force came to be the only hope for a truly scientific solution. In self-defense he had to adopt a manner pushing aside hysterical passengers who'd have taken up all his time.

But then there came a day when a delegation from the

ship-passengers waited on him. The Planetary President of Maninea headed it; he was accompanied by the Minister of State of Kholar, the Chairman of the Lower House Committee, the Speaker of the Senate, the Minister of Commerce, and others. It was a stately delegation, though now and again muscles twitched in what should have been composed features.

"Mr. Bedell!" said the Planetary President. "The municipal authorities tell me that some scientists believe you know what has caused the monstrous state of affairs in which we find ourselves."

"Together with the Astrophysical Institute," said Bedell mildly, "I've offered some suggestions. We're trying to get experimental evidence for certain ideas. There are a number of things that seem to support the opinion we hold. But it isn't yet proved."

THERE WAS a pause. The Planetary President said firmly, "Suppose you tell us, Mr. Bedell! Decisive action must be taken, and soon! Where did that other ship and

its company of imposters come from?"

"Where did we come from?" asked Bedell matter-of-factly.

"No hocus-pocus!" rasped the Minister of Commerce. "We're in no mood to be trifled with! Answer the question!"

"There's some resemblance between the two ship's companies," insisted Bedell, "so the question's relevant. We come from Kholar. But more certainly we come from ten days ago and the marriage of our parents. We come from the voyages of the early explorers or space. We come from events more surely than from places. I'm here because by accident I got passage on the *Corianis*. You are here from a longer but certain series of events. Do you understand? If you want to know where the other ship comes from, I have to name events rather than places!"

"This is nonsense!" fumed the Minister of Commerce.

"It's the fact..."

"Answer the question!" commanded the Planetary President, ominously. "Where did the imposters come from? How have they deceived the police?

I warn you that there can be no more delay! These frauds must be unmasked, and at once..."

"The evidence—what there is—" said Bedell angrily, "points to this ship as the abnormal, and you as the imposters! It's very probable that this is the ship which doesn't belong here!"

ANGER bubbled over. These were practical men who'd been unable to do anything practical. They were half-mad with nerve-strain and frustration and bewilderment. Every man of them faced the possibility that an imposter might take his name and place and identity, and acquire with them his destiny and all his achievements. It was intolerable even to fear such a thing. These men wanted an answer that would give them something violent and satisfying to do.

"Damned nonsense!" raged the Minister of Commerce. "We know what we've got to do. Let's get it over with!"

And Bedell suddenly roared at them. He astonished himself. But he was no longer the mild

and diffident and self-conscious person that previous events had made of him. Recent events had made it necessary for him to act in a new fashion.

"Idiots!" he roared. "Idiots! Your doubles on the other *Corianis* think the same way you do! Half an hour ago—not having a me to annoy beforehand—they tried to rush the police between these two ships, to get inside here and every man kill his own counterpart! The police gassed them down! That's what you'll try! And the police will gas you down! Try to reach that other ship to do murder! Try it!"

He glared at them and stamped from the room. Kathy followed him. Outside, he turned to glare at her because he thought she was one of the delegation. But he nodded when he recognized her.

"I had to shout at them," he said morosely. "They aren't actually idiots. They're desperate. They're ready to kill to settle who they are, and who their families will welcome, and who their children will call father. Damn them! They've got to get so worked up that they're willing to commit suicide to get

things back to normal! The men at the Astrophysical Institute have worked with me, and that's what has to be done. And there's no danger to it at all! But how can a man argue with men half-crazy with worry? Damn this business!"

XI

AS A matter-of-fact precaution, the police of Maninea removed the signal-rockets from both *Corianis* during the forenoon of the next day. The signal-rockets carried fission bombs. The police also mounted guns that could be used if either *Corianis* took off without authority. The occupants of both ships visibly teetered on the edge of crack-ups. It was simple reason to disarm them as far as possible, after a mass attempt by the men of one ship to invade the other. The authorities of Maninea, withholding authority from the Planetary President because there were two of him, behaved with conspicuous sanity.

But sanity did not make matters easier for anybody. There were rumblings and mutterings

everywhere. Science could not explain how duplicate ships and duplicate persons had come into being; so the man on the street either tried to think for himself—without much success—or else accepted the most dramatic explanation suggested by anybody else.

The most alarming suggestion was, of course, that protean, monstrous creatures from far-away worlds of horror, able to assume the forms of men, had come to Maninea to pass as humans and practise their grisly amusements with humans as victims and subjects.

An ill-advised humorist presented himself in a small city a hundred miles from the capital. As a practical joke, he pretended to have been a passenger on the *Corianis*. To increase the effect of his jest, he was so unwise as to pretend an ill-concealed appetite for human flesh. To bring his practical joke to its peak, he put what appeared to be bloodstains on his linen where he could pretend to be unaware of them. He saw the horror and the terror he inspired. He was enormously amused. In fact, he was in a visiphone booth, hilariously

telling a distant friend about the joke he'd played on the simple yokels here, when he found them congregating about the booth.

He opened the door and, chortling, made terrifying noises.

They tore him to pieces.

A CHILD was missed by its mother half a thousand miles from the spaceport. She screamed that the monsters from space had taken it. A mob formed and went surging here and there looking for somebody to kill. Fortunately, they found nobody.

A horror-broadcast impresario misguidedly took advantage of the public absorption in monsters. He produced a broadcast play dealing with the invasion of a planet by creatures which could take the forms of men, at will. The production simulated a newscast, but it was fiction. It was announced as such, and three times during its presentation the audience was reminded that it was make-believe. But the audience saw characters in the drama—of perfectly human aspect—let themselves relax and flow into horrible, shapeless slugs, which

crawled over and devoured other members of the *dramatis personae*. It was not a good play, but its audience panicked because it had the form of a news broadcast. Citizens armed themselves desperately. They overwhelmed the police with demands for instruction and protection. Many sober-sided, civilized men fled with their families to the wilds.

And nobody seemed ashamed, afterwards. Two ships still rested at the spaceport. There were two duplicate sets of people. But this could not be so one set could not be human. Therefore the other set...

A SULLENNESS came over the population of Maninea. There was not one single person who'd arrived on the *Corianis*—either of her—who had not returned to the ship. A few had left the first-arrived *Corianis* before the second appeared. They came back and asked to come on board. People looked at them with ominous eyes. Everywhere they went, conversation stopped; small mobs tended to gather before their houses. They weren't safe away

from the ship they'd come on.

They weren't safe there.

Raging, rumbling, aimless congregations of people seemed to roam the streets of the capital city. Hours passed and night fell and they did not disperse. There were many people who were literally afraid to go to their own homes. They felt safe only when among many others. Now and again men gathered around someone who talked in a low tone. Presently there were orators with sweating, earnest faces, shouting about the monsters at the spaceport. Some of the people there were human—maybe. But there were others who were aliens, who weren't human, who passed as human. It was too bad if human people had to be killed to make sure that all the monsters died, but...

These things were reported to the two ships by the police. The police gathered strong forces at the spaceport. Jack Bedell worked feverishly, with a continuous vision-phone connection to the Astrophysical Institute. On a certain morning the Institute reported that identical metal plates from inside the two ships acted differently at blue-

white temperature. One vanished on reaching an apparently critical heat.

Kathy took notes for Bedell, these days. She gathered that it proved that the situation of one of the two *Corianis* was inherently unstable. If it got the right kind of a nudge, it would shift to a stable condition. Kathy had no idea what a stable condition would be, but she was beginning to imagine a satisfactory state of things for herself.

BEDELL depended on her. That stout and wistful Mr. Brunn, who was her official boss, took no interest in anything but the liquids which enabled him to face fate and chance and destiny from a roseate haze. But Jack Bedell talked absorbedly to her in the rare moments when he was not working by remote control with the staff of the Astrophysical Institute.

On the second night after the delegation demanded an answer from him to prove the other ship's company imposters—three hours after dark—Bedell was restless.

"Everything seems stalled,"

he said irritably. "They're getting worried over at the Institute. They found a high-temperature difference in the hull-materials reaction, but that's hardly a practical answer. And time's running out. There's contagious hysterical hatred of us building up. Something's got to happen!"

Kathy waited, watching his expression as he frowned.

"In one sense, our being here—and the other *Corianis* too—does nobody any harm. But they believe one set of us isn't human. They figure we can't be! They figure every duplicate may be—must be—something alien and horrible that's only pretending to be a man. So that hate."

"You and I—we aren't duplicates," said Kathy forlornly.

"We've duplicates back on Kholar," said Bedell. "By the way, I wrote to my duplicate to look your duplicate up. I told him he'll like you."

KATHY WRITHED internally. It was not pleasant to think of another self who knew all she knew and thought exactly as she did and could do anything she thought of. It was

frightening, even six light-years away.

"I'm bothered about that hatred," said Bedell again. He paced jerkily up and down the room. "There've been mobs formed to storm the space-port and kill us. The police headed them off. Trucks have been found loaded with explosives, hauled by men desperate enough to run them under the ships and set them off. But the police won't always be able to hold the mobs back. There'll come a time when they'll have to kill, to protect us. I doubt we're worth it."

"Couldn't we go somewhere else?" asked Kathy.

"Where? If they went off, we'd know where they went. We think alike. If we went off... No."

Kathy said unhappily, "But you talk as if they were—real! You talk as if the people on the other ship were as real as the people on this! As if they weren't—monsters or imposters."

He checked in his pacing to stare at her in astonishment.

"Haven't you realized? Don't you remember looking out of a port between worlds and seeing

the stars, and great black masses floating about. Didn't you realize what they meant at least when you saw the other *Corianis*?"

Kathy shook her head. It occurred to her that Bedell would always talk about ideas—even to her—when there were much more satisfying things to talk about. She suddenly had a forlorn little daydream in which Jack Bedell would look at her with shining, adoring eyes, and they'd be close together and neither one say a word for a long time.

BUT SHE heard phrases "In overdrive a ship skips from one place where it can't stay to another place where it can't stay either... much faster than light But it can't skip into a place where there's something else... a meteor Then..."

She looked at him dutifully and tried to understand.

We ran into some debris that was rolling through space. We ran into a clump too big to be skipped. We couldn't skip beyond it, or to the right or left or up or down. But we had to skip! It wasn't possible

for us to stay long enough to be destroyed by the collision! We had to skip somewhere. And we did!"

Kathy blinked. Her hands twisted, one inside the other.

"We skipped into another sequence of events. This sequence," said Bedell triumphantly—"I'm not talking about another place. It isn't places that count. It's events. We started out in a sequence in which I caught the *Corianis* and you had the job another girl gave up to get married. We skipped to a sequence of events in which I hadn't caught the *Corianis* and you hadn't gotten the job. We made that skip when we ran into stuff in space."

The visiphone called. He swung to answer it. Kathy tried to figure out what he'd just said. Places didn't matter. Events did... Suddenly she caught her breath, realizing.

"Hell's broken loose," said Bedell grimly. "The Institute just called. Mobs were roaming around the city, and there weren't enough police to keep them apart. They joined up. They're coming out here to kill us."

"But..."

"We'll have to take off," said Bedell vexedly. "And just when our experimental results were so good! But we have to take the chance."

He started for the door.

"Wh-what'll you do?" asked Kathy in alarm.

"Unfortunately I'm not a hero," said Bedell, "so I have to act like a scoundrel. Maybe I can persuade the skipper to commit suicide for all of us. That's the only chance we've got. But I don't really think it's very risky!"

XII

THE control-room of the *Corianis* looked out upon the space-port. It was night, but both of Maninea's moons floated overhead, and the other *Corianis* glittered in the pallid light. There were rows of cold-white sparks which were the lights at the space-port's edges. Lights showed in the ports of the other ship. The skipper of the *Corianis* looked dully toward the sky-glow which was the reflection of the street-lamps of the capital city.

Bedell forced his way into the control-room. Kathy came close behind him. The skipper turned hopeless eyes toward them.

"I know!" said Bedell testily. "I know passengers aren't allowed in the control-room! But there's a mob headed out from the city. They've got explosives. They've got thermite. They've got sticks and stones and bombs, and they're going to smash both ships and kill everybody in them—they think!"

The skipper said drearily: "They might as well."

"Don't be an idiot!" snapped Bedell. "You know I've been working with the astrophysical institute to get this thing straight! Our calculations are finished — just finished! I can tell you how to handle everything! Get set to lift off!"

The skipper said as slowly as before:

"The police are moving away. I saw 'em go. I was just thinking that with them gone I can lift the *Corianis* and smash that other ship. Maybe smash the *Corianis*, too, but at least that other skipper won't

go to my family and have my children call him."

Bedell growled, "He's planning exactly the same thing!" he snapped. "I'm the only factor-of-difference! Otherwise you'll think exactly alike! I'll call him! Where's the intership communicator?"

HE FOUND it. He called, impatiently. A suspicious, raging voice replied, it was the voice of the skipper, coming from the other space-craft. Bedell spoke crisply.

There was confusion by the control-room door. The Planetary President of Maninea pushed in. With him were other passengers.

"Captain!" said the President, with fine dignity. "There's a mob on the way here from the city. Either it has to be fought off by the police, costing lives, or this ship must take off to prevent senseless slaughter. As President of this planet, I order you to take off to space and go in orbit until this situation can be adjusted."

Bedell, talking into the intership phone, said harshly, "Yes. The President in this ship just gave the same order!

Now listen! If we get out to space, and you destroy us there, there'll be no survivors from this ship. You want that! We want it the other way. But we both want this thing ended! We'll go up ten thousand miles and wait for you! Then we'll settle things!"

Kathy made an exclamation from where she gazed out a port of the control-room. There was a peculiar darkness at the edge of the space-port. The darkness flowed like water toward the two ships. The ground grew black where it spread.

IT WAS people. It was a mob of humans, desperate beyond measure, frightened past mercy, swarming out to destroy the two ships which seemed to them the most horrible of dangers. There were few who had not heard the explanation Bedell had given Kathy only a little while since, but they had that hysterical terror of the abnormal which made their ancestors kill witches in the past ages. To them, the duplicate humans in the two ships seemed worse than witches. They were in-

possibilities—unless they were most malignant doom.

So the people of Maninea blackened the ground as they marched to destroy the space-ships. They blackened acres of ground, tens of acres. They were mad with fear and horror. They flowed on . . .

Bedell used a voice he hadn't known he owned. He rasped at the skipper in a tone of utter, unquestionable authority, "Prepare for take-off!"

The skipper moved convulsively. But he had intended to, anyhow.

"Straight up!" snapped Bedell. "Up to ten thousand miles! The other ship will follow!"

The skipper pressed a button. The *Corianis* lifted. Jack Bedell could not let anyone else issue orders, or the impetus of his leadership would be lost.

"Full vertical thrust!" he rasped. "You —" He pointed to the Planetary President. "Watch the other ship! It's following. Watch it!" He pointed a finger at the Minister of State for Kholar. "You! Clear that mob away from the door! We want no interference!"

The ship rose and rose. The

sky had not been bright. It became black, with specks of stars in it. The vast bulk of the planet underneath lost all its features. The ship rose toward the shining moons. The rim of the planet became visible because it blotted out half the galaxy. Up and up and up...

The sun of Maninea came into view, and automatic shutters dimmed its blinding light.

"Watch for that other ship!" rasped Bedell. He had no authority, but he had a plan. The others knew only fury and despair. "Keep watching!"

THE Planetary President said tensely "It's coming! It just rose into sunlight!"

"Off to one side!" snapped Bedell to the skipper. "Set up for overdrive! We're going to hit them from overdrive! There'll not be a particle of that ship left! Aim for it! Line it up! You'll not leave one man aboard it to take your place and your family and your destiny!"

The skipper's fingers fumbled. He leaned back.

"Into overdrive!" rasped Bedell. "Now!"

With a grimace of satisfied

hatred, the skipper stabbed home the overdrive button.

The stars went out. Something arced horribly. There was the reek of burned insulation. The arcing ended. The stars came back.

The ship lay dead in space, with the dark mass of the night side of Maninea below and that planet's twin moons shining brightly above. The spare overdrive was burned out, now. But there was no other *Corianis*.

"Now," said Bedell in a wholly different tone, "now call down to the planet and ask for landing instructions."

There were babblings, but there was no other *Corianis*. Jack Bedell's orders had been followed, and the other ship was gone. In fact, Bedell was the only man in the control-room who had any clear ideas. The quartermaster made the call, somehow numbly. Because he was bereft of all opinions, he used the form all ships use when coming in from space, to ask for clearance for descent.

NOW EVERY man in the control-room heard the astounded reply from below.

"Corianis? You're the Corianis? What the hell happened! You're written off as lost in space! Come on down! Your coordinates are—Wait a minute!" They heard the voice calling excitedly, away from the microphone at the spaceport down below. *"The Corianis is coming in! She's not lost! She's coming in! She's coming in!"*

There was dead silence in the control-room. And Bedell said in an explanatory tone, with something like diffidence, "He's surprised to hear from us. Naturally! This is our original time-track. In this sequence of events, we've been missing in space for almost three weeks. Our being in the other sequence was an unstable condition. We got into it because we ran into a mass of rock and metal out in emptiness. We couldn't skip ahead or aside, but we couldn't stay in contact with it long enough to be destroyed. So we skipped out of that sequence of events. When we hit the other *Corianis*, just now, it was the same thing in reverse. We didn't belong in that sequence of events. So when we couldn't skip past

or to any side of it—why—we came back to our own universe."

He paused, and said painfully, "It's very much like the old nursery rhyme, really. *'There was a man in our town, and he was wondrous wise. He jumped into a bramble bush, and scratched out both his eyes. And when he found his eyes were out, with all his might and main, he jumped into another bush, and scratched them in again.'* I'm explaining to you because you'll have some trouble believing us."

XIII

HE WAS QUITE right. On Maninea they didn't know anything about recent events. Rather, the recent events they knew about were quite different ones from those the passengers on the *Corianis* remembered. They were a different sequence.

But things adjusted. The Planetary President resumed his office, with no competition. The Minister of State for Kholar had the shakes for several days, and then dignifiedly sug-

gested that the trade-treaty under discussion be completed. And it was. And the aides and assistants and secretaries, and the wives and nurses and children, were all congratulated for their success in reaching port after their disaster in space.

But Jack Bedell didn't want any of it. Nor did Kathy. Bedell wanted to work out, at the astrophysical institute on Maninea, the mathematics and the new information derivable from his experience. He was offered living-quarters there, for his convenience. He conferred with Kathy. They went off for a honeymoon in the Leaning Hills district, and then settled down at the Institute for the time being.

There was only one professional consequence for Bedell from the *Corianis* disaster. The Planetary President invited Bedell and Kathy to the Presidential palace, and gave him a medal—which he passed on to Kathy to wear if she felt like it. And then, while they were having luncheon, the President said, "Hm. We crashed into the other *Corianis* at full overdrive speed. We bounced back into our own time-line—our own se-

quence of events. But what happened to the other ship?"

"Nothing," said Bedell. "We didn't hit it. We bounced to keep from hitting it. So they undoubtedly decided that we run away. And that would be proof that we were the imposters. So the real you—and—everybody is undoubtedly received in the best human society again, and everybody's satisfied."

"I—see," said the President doubtfully.

But he didn't. Nor did anybody else. The Minister of Commerce had a bad case of nerves for some time after. So did others. And it is history that after the trade-treaty was concluded, it was a very white-faced group which boarded a space-ship to go back to Kholar, and it is history that none of them ever made another space-journey.

BUT EVERYTHING seemed to work out all right. Once, to be sure, Kathy brought up a subject Bedell hadn't mentioned.

"There was another you on Kholar," she said uneasily, "and you said there was another

er me. And you wrote to the other you and suggested that—that he try to get acquainted with the other me. Do you suppose he did?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" said Bedell abstractedly. "If I'd gotten a letter from him, saying something like that, I'd have looked up the girl."

Kathy grimaced. "What I'm wondering is—are they happy?"

"Why not?" asked Bedell in surprise. "Why shouldn't they be? They're the same as us, aren't they?" Then he said cautiously. "Mmmmm. We've been doing some computations at the Astrophysical Institute here, Kathy. We're pretty sure that

what happened to the *Corianis* by accident can be accomplished on purpose. There are some of us who want to take a small ship and ram a minor asteroid in overdrive and see what other sequence of events we can run into. We'll be able to get back, of course!"

Kathy drew a deep breath. She began to speak. She'd been a very shy person; she'd found it difficult to talk to anybody. But it was surprising how many things she found to say, without hesitation or delay or embarrassment, in telling her husband what she thought about that proposal.



Two Engrossing Novelets

THE COLOCON FEMALE *Charles V. De Vet*

What should have been a student trip for Prahl was turning out to be as dangerous an assignment as an experienced agent would draw. And the mysterious "chum" which was supposed to trigger off wild talents, wasn't helping very much.

THE CHRYSALIDS *Rosser Reeves*

When is a corpse not a corpse? Could be: "When it's actually a member of a corps of alien visitors". And the next disguise that "General Carrington" would take called for a super-display of all those histrionic talents dear to the Gornae . .

featured in the April issue of

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Editorial

Make It New

EVERY NOW and then, some science fiction fan (or group of fans) comes forth with an amateur publication which is mainly devoted to a serious examination of science fiction. Such publications are as welcome as they are unexpected; and the reason they're unexpected is not that we consider science fictionists fundamentally incapable of such products, but that a critical journal is extremely difficult to set up and maintain on an amateur basis. The editor has to be a person

of discernment himself, has to have some idea of what constitutes serious examination of science fiction. He must then decide who among the potential contributors is qualified to write on which aspects of the subject; and then hope that the person in question has the interest and time to spare.

Science fiction authors who are qualified to write the sort of articles that this sort of publication wants are likely as not to have the interest but not the time. On the other hand, sometimes, the most

willing and enthusiastic contributor may be the least qualified to handle the subject.

Thus, the appearance of the first issue of *New Frontiers* from Norman Metcalf, Stellar Enterprises, PO Box 336, Berkeley 1, California, is cause for rejoicing. Internal evidence shows that it took a long time to gather the material and achieve the production—whether it was the first or second item which held up the works can't be determined; but some of the contents were written about two years ago. Which doesn't matter a bit, since the sort of material that belongs in a publication of this nature won't be obsolete in two years, or five years for that matter.

THE PUBLICATION is planned to appear quarterly, sells for 30¢ the copy (or \$1.00 for 4 issues) and the article which inspired this editorial—"Back To the High Road, Boys!" by Mark Clifton—is alone worth the price of a year's subscription. Not that I agree in every respect; in fact the areas of disagreement, or qualification, form the substance of this editorial, but the author clearly wrote this for a particular purpose: to make the reader think. And

I hope the following will convince you that he succeeded in one instance. (To make the reader think the same way the author does is, of course, part of his purpose; but the non-fanatical essayist will be content with having achieved the first objective.)

Speaking of the literature of science fiction, Clifton says: "... This literature has standards of merit quite distinct from those standards applied to mainstream writing. The standards of mainstream were established three hundred years ago, and aside from normal language evolution there have been no substantial changes in basic ideas of literary merit in that three centuries. This means it is a static art which produces a conventionalized design, and no longer serves a creative function."

I could not disagree more with what Clifton says here—and yet, I think I agree with what he's driving at.

There certainly is around us a static art which produces an endless stream of so-called novels in various conventionalized designs, and which no longer serves a creative function—if it ever did; and this is frequently called "mainstream" fiction. I haven't bothered to examine this cor-

pus undelectable myself; but I have read enough about it, and heard enough about it in much the same terms, to deduce that such a thing does indeed exist. So I think I can avoid the (literary) cardinal sin of discussing or passing opinion upon books I haven't read by saying that just about everything else I have heard about "mainstream" fiction pretty much concurs with what Clifton says above; and that I am satisfied that the critics are not trying to perpetrate a fraud, or are indulging in fantasy, but are reporting upon something which is there for me to read if I want to find out for myself.

THEN WHERE does disagreement come in? It comes in in the unstated but implied contention that "mainstream" is or was synonymous with serious literature. That what Clifton rejects today is not substantially different from what it was three centuries back—except that, at one time, it did serve a creative function.

Before continuing, I want to quote Clifton's four irreducible ingredients of worthy science fiction, and say that generally I agree with them.

"1. Thinking can be fun, it

is not morally wrong to think, and he who does it will not necessarily come to a bad end.

"2. Knowledge and reason must be used to solve the problem.

"3. Our theme must either be the revealment of a hitherto obscure and unrecognized problem, or we must bring out hitherto unrecognized and obscure evidence and facts which shed light on an old problem.

"4. We must come directly to grips with that problem, either to show what may happen if we continue to evade it, or to offer at least one possible solution to it."

Now these four elements, I agree, are indeed necessary to a worthwhile work of science fiction; but they are *no less necessary to literature, per se.*

LET'S TAKE the first requirement of "thinking". Mr. Clifton notes that in a great deal of "mainstream" fiction there is a "consistent attitude towards the man of learning that he is either a fool or a villain".

In the great works of literature, what is stressed is *not* that thinking in itself is morally wrong, or that the man of learning must necessarily come to a bad end, but that

there is a vast difference between "knowledge" and "wisdom". The fool may be filled with facts and information ("knowledge"); the villain may also have learning—but neither have wisdom. Those involved in the "quiz show" fixes had plenty of knowledge. "Wisdom" consists of the right orientation toward God and man—and the truly "wise" man is the man who uses such facts and information as he possesses "to love mercy and justice and walk humbly before the Lord". The foolish man or the villain (after all, the villain is a fool in the last analysis) use their knowledge to serve self alone, or to pursue worthless and false values regardless of consequence; and their knowledge is turned to their own destruction.

Consider, for example, the Abbe in Dumas' "Count of Monte Cristo". Here is a wise man; but no amount of knowledge or wisdom will necessarily preserve one from the vicissitudes of fortune, or from the machinations of wicked. The abbe is a man of great learning; and instead of despairing or consuming himself in hatred when he is thrown into prison unjustly (from which he has little hope of release short of death), his wisdom

and knowledge sustain him through his ordeal. And though his plans for escape come to naught, he is enabled to bring comfort to another prisoner (Dantes) and is the instrument of Dantes' escape from the chateau.

NOW DANTES himself entered the chateau as a man of little learning; he emerged with a vast fund of information—but not with corresponding wisdom. The story of his revenge upon those who were responsible for his imprisonment is an exciting one; and there is impersonal justice in it. Dantes is wise enough to make his enemies destroy themselves—he doesn't gun 'em down personally. I don't recall now whether Dantes realizes the emptiness and pointlessness of vengeance at the end or not—whether he has achieved some measure of wisdom—but my point is that here Dumas (whether intentionally or not) has underlined the difference between wisdom and learning—between thought directed toward self and thought in tune with truth which makes for sound living. (And the way one weathers disappointment, frustration, and injustice is the tipoff as to whether one is

wise or just stuffed with information.)

Why then, one may ask, do the wise men in literature often (or usually) seem to get the tarry end of the stick? One reason is for the sake of realism: the wise and honest man is not necessarily going to be revered by those around him. When he's up against corruption, he's likely to get in trouble because he won't collaborate with it—or because, under the circumstances, his very existence is considered as a threat by the fools and villains. In real life, of course, there are and have been such things as wise men who did not get into spectacular or highly dramatic trouble. But in general, the purposes of fiction (among which are communications of the author's own truth) require conflict and stress. It's the way that one behaves under stress that reveals character.

WISDOM includes the use of knowledge and reason to solve, or deal with problems. (All problems may not be solvable.) If literature seems to be more full of fools and villains than wise men and women, don't blame authors that more of us are foolish and villainous, to some

degree, than we are wise.

In reality (and in true literature) emotionalism frequently displaces reason. In science fiction reason *must* triumph so far as scientific problems are concerned; it may or may not triumph so far as personal problems are involved.

One of the faults in science fiction used to be the attempt to dispense with emotion entirely—or where it was present, one found only a caricature of emotions. In the past decade, as Clifton points out, reason and knowledge was often thrown out entirely.

It seems, then, when Clifton is talking about "mainstream" fiction he really means "commercial" or "popular" fiction, written down to the level of the barely literate or "slickly" streamlined for the lowest common denominator.

In earlier times there was "popular didactic" fiction, which was written to instruct in moral values—and which was greatly over-simplified, saying such things as, "Don't envy the rich and knowledgeable, because they are often proud and riding to their own destruction." "A simple and virtuous man is better than a learned fool or scoundrel". This easily gets corrupted—particularly under commercial

pressures to sell the public "what it wants"—into: "... the stupid and ignorant are more virtuous and more admirable than those men of learning whom they fear and distrust." as Clifton puts it.

IN POINTS three and four, the difference between this requirement for science fiction and a similar requirement for literature is only that science fiction must, of necessity, have a scientific problem in it.

And you can separate the worthwhile from the trivial or worse in non-science fiction on this four-point basis. In every true masterpiece of literature, you will find that (with the single exception that there need not be a scientific problem) Clifton's four requirements are filled. A character may believe that thinking is wrong, but does the work as a *whole* denigrate thinking as *such* (or just a certain type of thinking—another matter entirely)? Does the work as a *whole* show problems solved or dealt with by knowledge and reason (reason including wisdom)?

With these demurs it seems to me that Clifton is saying pretty much the same that I have been trying to say for some years; that science fic-

tion which is worthwhile shares the same fundamental basic values as literature—the great works. There are differences in degree, necessarily, but not differences in kind.

What about attention to background detail, scene setting, etc.? Science fiction invariably requires it to a large degree, where literature may not always require it. "The Idiot" (which I mention because I used it before) does indeed contain a great deal of background information which tells the present day reader much about 19th Century Russian society—but much more is taken for granted by the author. On the other hand, consider "Robinson Crusoe": by the time we have finished it, we know that island as thoroughly as we ought to know Mars (or a section of Mars) or a future or alien society in a really good science fiction tale.

THE INVENTION of printing, the spread of popular education, (or rather, just the bare ability to read) produced a market for fiction; and as the "bare literacy" increased, the market for fiction aimed at the lowest common denominator expanded. I, personally, would call the "main-

stream of fiction" that fiction produced for the widest possible audience, and "literature" those works which, while having a wide appeal, are far above the main stream both in intent and achievement.

And what, in the last analysis, makes the difference? It is not the theme or the background or the plot or even the characters, in themselves. These can be "different" in an inferior or "main stream" work; but there is a sameness nonetheless in that, however exotic the setting, etc., people still experience the same sort of things in the same manner, and there is nothing here to make you think or feel in any different manner than you thought or felt before reading the story.

THE PREACHER in *Ecclesiastes* complains that there is nothing *new* under the sun; and in a sense he is right—today, as yesterday. Massacre by a new and more efficient weapon is still massacre, and the victims are just as dead as if they'd been slain in the good old ways. Whether you believe in the doctrine of "original sin" or not, a study of history—or just a good close look around—

shows that people generally tend to choose the evil rather than the good: that which is bad for them, personally, or which is destructive to those around them, or both.

But truth is always new, because none of us are born with it; we all have the chance to learn and we all have the chance to pass it along. And each generation is different, each needs the old made new for them in order to understand. New discoveries in science and thought *can* cast light on that which does not change; and one of the many ways to describe an enduring work of fiction is to say that the author has "made it new", no matter what else he has done. It is this element of newness that science fiction needs, and will continue to need; it is the specific manner in which the element is presented which makes science fiction different from non-science fiction, regardless of the quality of the individual example.

And in this sense, I heartily echo Clifton's slogan for writers who want to make science fiction something they can take pleasure in writing and reading: "Back To The High Road, Boys!" RAWL.



this year

and

no

other

by David Grinnell

There was a reason why a crime which had been committed two hundred thousand years previously belonged to the jurisdiction of this court, and no other.

LADIES and gentlemen of the jury—

It is with a certain humble awe that I address you today to present the case for the prosecution. In the course of my career as the elected prosecutor for our state, I have had many occasions to present the demands of justice against those who have transgressed. Yet in this instance the unusual, in fact unprecedented and hitherto *unprecedented* facts of this truly humble me. For the justice you are being asked to mete out concerns a crime that antedates this court, this state, this republic, and, yes, this civilization — and perhaps very likely this very species of man.

Yet in a very exact way this case does belong to this day, this society, and this court. This year and no other, this defendant and no other.

You have all been selected, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, on the basis of your disclaimers to knowledge of the special circumstances of this crime. Therefore it befalls to me to present the case to you as simply and yet as precisely as possible.

As citizens claiming no spe-

cial knowledge of science beyond that of the average layman, you may possibly have heard vaguely of what is called the Yerke Effect in physics. But I am sure that, like myself, you know little more of it than its name. That its discovery by Dr. Frans Yerke of Oslo won that scientist a Nobel Prize two years ago you may be aware. But this is probably the extent of your knowledge.

I WILL not here attempt to describe this principle to you. I am not qualified to do so. In the course of the trial to come, the state intends to call several witnesses from the ranks of noted scientists to explain the operations of this obscure law to you. It has a very definite bearing on this case. Briefly, as you may also possibly have gleaned from newspaper and magazine sensationalism, it seems to point a way to the fabled dream of traveling through time.

According to Dr. Yerke, there are certain circumstances of time, space, and geology which could, when brought into conjunction, open a brief crack or perhaps loop in the skein of

Time by which—for a limited moment—contact could be made with a living section of the remote past. The nature of Dr. Yerke's calculations, according to what I am told, surpass in abstruseness even the immortal Einstein's mathematics. The practical application of this theory to everyday living seemed remote.

Remote to all the world save Arthur Rainier. The late Arthur Rainier, a citizen of this state and resident of our city, was until a year ago an instructor in physics at Central High School. A young man, he was gifted with a great talent for science, a talent now lost to the world forever. For that young teacher, well known to his students for his handsome thatch of wavy black hair and the kind of piercing yet dreaming eyes that gave his bobby-sox pupils palpitations, had worked out the first practical application of the Yerke Effect.

ARTHUR RAINIER determined that a time loop was due to open within striking distance of this city last year. Applying the difficult calculations to his native locale,

he found where this spot would likely occur, the period, and further hypothesized the means of utilizing this knowledge. He called on his colleague, Rudolph Herz, teacher of general science, for advice and together they worked out the plans for a vehicle that could traverse this time flaw. This craft, which was not too difficult to construct, would require more money and more technical skill than either of these men could manage in the short time open to them. So they took their problem to a firm of mechanical contractors.

Here they met the defendant, Kermit Kurman. Mr. Kurman was, as you will learn, an expert mechanic, a clever businessman, and a capable engineer. When the two theoreticians put their problem before him, he rapidly sketched out the construction. Becoming enthusiastic himself, he offered to accompany them, and further offered to have his bank advance a loan to cover the costs. In so doing, he aroused the interest of one of the bank officials, Sanford Jones, and Mr. Jones, having the commercial exploitation of the inven-

tion in mind, asked to join the three in their trial trip.

SO IT WAS that in two months time, last April to be exact, the four gathered at the Kurman plant to make their expedition. Their vehicle was not very fantastic. It was no Wellsian construction of crystals and gold and four-dimensional bends. It was simply a second-hand Army jeep, in whose back had been placed the box containing the induction mechanism, and from which wires ran to all parts of the car, the whole being powered by a strong portable battery. In this car the four piled provisions for several days, took a good hunting rifle and ammunition, cameras, and other necessities. Thus laden, they drove out of the city.

They drove forty miles north to the mountains and then along the mountain road, high into the snowy regions, to where Crystal Lake nestles high up in the range. Here they paused long enough to check their timing with the position of the sun and moon, to get readings on the magnetic and geodetic points. These readings

indicated that their best spot would be the very center of this lake itself.

Fortunately there is a small island there, a mere patch of rocky ground—the spire, geologists say, of some long-sunken mountain peak. The lake was still solidly frozen over, and they were able to drive their car, heavy as it was, over the ice to this little patch of rock and onto it. The sun had just risen and the area was still deserted.

At precisely the calculated time Arthur Rainier started their reaction. There was, I understand, a period of charged tension, then a sort of muffled explosion, and a severe shock. But in an instant the world had changed.

THEY WERE still among mountains, still seated in their jeep. But where there had been lake, there was rock and crags. Instead of being on an island, they were perched high up on peak towering among giant mountains greater than those we know today. This was the world as it had been some two hundred thousand years ago!

The four men got out, looked around, shook hands. Kurman and Jones seemed disappointed. Outside of the size and jaggedness of the mountains, the world was much the same as they had known it. There were trees no different from those we know today. There were patches of prosaic grass, some wild flowers of familiar types, a few perfectly familiar species of birds were flying. The sky was blue, there were a few fleecy clouds, and it was summertime. It could have been any day in our own years.

Herz explained to his companions that this was quite as it should be. To men, perhaps this was an age unthinkable distant, but to nature it was essentially the same epoch as our own, less a few ice ages. Crystal Lake was perhaps a geologically recent product of the last ice age, a mere twenty thousand years ago; obviously long before that, there had been upheavals, other ice ages, quakes and tremors which had sunk this mountain on which they stood, had created the depression the lake would one day fill, had filed down the jagged peaks, folded others

under, and tamed this patch of broken land.

Nonetheless, explanation or not, their work was not going to be easier for it. They could not hope to drive their jeep around in exploration. It would have to stay perched where it was while they hiked. And hike they did.

THE FOUR, laden with provisions and surveying equipment, climbed down the side of that mountain and walked through that primeval mountain range for three days. By then, it was clear that they simply would not have time to reach the level plains in the limited period of the time flaw. It was on the third day that they made their discovery.

Rudolph Herz had been going ahead, carrying a Geiger counter; and when it started ticking furiously, he called his companions. They followed the trail of radioactivity to a cave in the side of the rocky cleft. Here the counter went wild, ticking away at a mad rate none had ever heard before.

After they had ascertained that the cavernous pit harbored no sleeping bear or mountain

tiger, it was a matter of a few minutes to discover that there was here the upthrust of a vein of almost pure uranium oxide—a vein undoubtedly buried miles beneath the mountains in our time, yet here open for the taking if a way could be found to cash in on it!

They camped outside the cave and consulted. Their time was short and Arthur Rainier pointed out that their very trip was a mere freak of time and space. Once they returned to this year, the flaw would probably vanish forever. They must try to mark the spot for mining operations two hundred thousand years later — meanwhile, they could certainly mine and pack enough uranium ore to more than pay their costs and leave them rich enough for more expeditions in other parts of the nation.

THEY FELL TO and during the next day had loaded themselves to capacity. They constructed a crude sledge on which they piled their ore. That night they fell asleep exhausted.

Sometime during the night, Rainier awoke to hear a scuf-

fling and panting. Thinking they had been attacked by a wild animal, he reached for their rifle only to find it missing. The roar of a shot outside his tent caused him to rush out. He was in time to see two men fighting, a third lying still on the ground. As he stared in shock, one of the two battlers fell to the ground, struck down. The remaining man, stepping back, pointed the rifle he was now seen to be carrying at Rainier and said, "Stand still and stay back!"

Rainier recognized Kurman's voice, harsh and panting with excitement. Kurman walked warily to the sledge, then hooking his free arm through the drag loop began to trudge away from the camp. "Wait!" shouted Rainier. "Wait! You can't leave us here!"

KURMAN stopped a moment to look back at him in the moonlight. "Come after me and you'll be shot on the spot. There's no one to ever know what happened to you. When I get back with this load, you'll be dead for two hundred thousand years and I'll be alive and rich."

"But you can't operate the jeep again without me to show you where to go next!" Rainier called, trying to appeal to the man's avarice. But Kurman merely called back, "Who needs it a second time?"

At that point, Rainier should perhaps have gone on tracking and harrassing Kurman until he tired. But the groans of his wounded friend caught his ear and he turned back to attend him.

Jones was dead, shot through the heart when he had first awakened to see Kurman making his getaway. Herz had suffered a broken shoulder-bone from a blow by the butt of the rifle.

By dawn, the two realized the desperacy of their position. Unarmed, one in pain and unable to carry a load, they could not hope to race Kurman back to the jeep. Herz urged Rainier to leave him and try to run, unburdened, ahead of the loaded Kurman and his sledge. But Arthur Rainier refused to abandon his friend to the mercy of the savage beasts and the wilderness of the primeval past. Instead, he stayed with him.

WE KNOW that Kermit Kurman returned safely to our time. The state will present the testimony of his employees to the effect that he drove the jeep back into their factory yard the day after he'd left; that he'd unloaded a heavy sack from the jeep; that he had his men dismantle the wiring and the device. There is now no blueprint or record of how this worked. The jeep itself has been impounded by the state as evidence.

It is also a matter of record that Kermit Kurman shortly afterwards made a trip to Utah carrying a heavy sack with him. That there he sold the U.S. Government purchasing agent uranium ore to the extent of a quarter million dollars. It is a matter of record that Kurman made the claim to have mined it himself at a secret mine, although it can be easily shown that no such mine exists and that Kurman's whereabouts are a matter of record.

It is also on record in the Bureau of Missing Persons that Arthur Rainier, Rudolph Herz, and Sanford Jones were reported missing that April and have never been seen alive again.

What then, you will wonder, constitutes the state's evidence. We have told you a strange story, but on what do we base it? If Kermit Kurman denies it, who can give evidence for it, who makes the charge of homicide?

In the bill of particulars presented to this court, the state officially charges Kermit Kurman with the premeditated murder of Sanford Jones. There is a reason for the singling out of this victim; there is evidence for the story we have told you. The missing men *did* find a way to present their charges to this court.

AS YOU KNOW, it was only last year that our state Ministry of Mining announced its plans for a systematic survey of the entire state for radioactive deposits. In previous years, there had been some sporadic amateur uranium prospecting in the mountains, which found some very slight traces of activity but nothing commercially valuable. It was the ministry's hope that a really systematic, all-embracing search might prove profitable to our local economy.

Being school teachers, Herz and Rainier knew of the plans for this survey. As members of the science faculty, they knew that it was planned to enlist the pupils themselves in field tours of the city and its environs with Geiger counters. They had expected to start such field tours on Saturdays in June, and follow along during the summer months.

This search did start in June, and I do not think there are many in this city who failed to share in the general excitement when on June 12th a very active reaction was detected in the center of Washington Park, in the heart of the city! For several days the papers followed the diggers as they worked down into a deep pit in the rocky corner just above the duck pond. Then the papers suddenly dropped the subject, turned the attention of the public to other matters and let it be implied that the search had fizzled out. This was the general impression until the day Kernit Kurman was arrested and the full discovery released to the press:

THE DELVERS had gone down about twenty feet into

virgin soil, ground that had never in our history been farmed, mined, or built upon. At the bottom, they ran into a cache. They found a crypt made of flat slabs of rock, fitted carefully together and crudely but efficiently cemented, airtight. Within this slab they found two bodies, dried and petrified. They found an airtight cannister that had once held first aid supplies, and which had been resealed to hold several sheets of metal-foil — presumably the wrappings of food and candy. On these sheets a story was told in handwriting unmistakably identified as that of Arthur Rainier and Rudolph Herz!

This story is the one I have told you. It was the means by which justice was made to span the eons to bring justice to this day and year.

For after Kurman had abandoned them Rainier and Herz took stock of their position and recognized its hopelessness. Even if they could survive, what could they look forward to? To live out another thirty years or so in loneliness in a wild world, forever removed from human company, from

even that of savages — this was no prospect. This was a living death, but no less murder from the viewpoint of the society to which they belonged. No, they wanted to thwart their slayer, to force his capture and punishment. They found a way. They knew that time would be good to them.

FOR THEY realized that, in all the long centuries of Earth's history, in all the years of human struggle, in the days of the rising and falling of cities and states and empires, there would come one year—one certain specific year and no other—when the relentless ticking of radioactive ore would be of interest to men in this geographic area. And that would not be in the years of Ancient Egypt, nor in Augustan Rome, nor the halls of the Aztecs. Neither yet would it be the years of Washington, or even of Wilson and Roosevelt. But it would be right now, *this year and no other*, when first this land in our city would be systematically *s e a r c h e d*, when first the tick here would be heeded and dug for. This year, this time, *their time*—

and Kermit Kurman's time.

Somehow the two men built a new sledge, mined more raw uranium ore. Somehow they preserved the body of Sanford Jones from decay by exposure to the bacteria-destroying energies of the radioactive pit and by the crude but effective means used by the Indians for embalming. They loaded this body on their sledge, loaded their ore and dragged this heavy burden step by step through the mountains and out of the mountains.

They had all the time in the universe to accomplish this. Herz's wound healed. The two men made their way, dragging their burden, fighting off predatory beasts, pausing to fish and hunt, to eventually reach the spot where our city was to be built two hundred thousand years in their future! The park, the one virgin spot of ground in the center of our city, was recognizable from its configuration, though we will never know how long it took them to study it out.

THERE THEY dug a pit, planted their cache of ore confident that it would still be

as violently radioactive in our time as it was in theirs, and above this ore they built their crypt. They placed Jones' body there, the bullet fired from Kermit Kurman's rifle still lodged in his chest. There they placed Rainier's account in its container. They guaranteed the preservation of the evidence by cunningly contriving to drive out most of the air in their sealed crypt, leaving a partial vacuum which would, in the space of centuries, fill up with the sterile inactive gaseous radiations of the uranium deposit, thus insuring the most perfect preservation known to science. There, sometime later, Rainier interred his friend Herz also when death came to him, though we do not know how many days or years passed before his death nor how he met his end.

RAINIER obviously passed away in loneliness somewhere on that primeval plain. His body is doubtless one with the elements of air and soil and rock. But when he died,

he knew, knew beyond a shadow of doubt, that he would be avenged. For he knew that, in all the thousands of years to come, it would only be in this certain one that uranium prospecting would be undertaken here. And he knew that the public park in our city would be one of the first sites to be surveyed. Given that, the discovery of the crypt was certain.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have been given a mandate for justice that antedates civilization itself. We have the evidence, all of it. We have a rifle, clean and modern, found in the possession of Kermit Kurman, and we have a bullet that has lain in the ground for two hundred thousand years that can be shown to have been fired from that rifle and no other. We have the *corpus delicti*. And we have the written testimony of two eye-witnesses of unimpeachable character.

The state is through with its presentation. Your Honor, we are ready to proceed with the trial.



the living urn

by Kate Wilhelm

When Winston saw the "living urn" that PonTasfil owned, he realized that he had been duped—he, Winston had bought an imitation. But perhaps one deception could be wiped out by another . .

WINSTON saw it as soon as he entered the room. There directly across from the door it stood, set apart from the other objects slightly by the simple, white-covered dais that held it. He drew in his breath shortly and with an effort turned to start his tour with the myriad paintings at his left. Only once during the long walk along the wall did his eyes steal back to it, and then only briefly—as if to reassure him that they had played no tricks with him.

PonTasfil was describing the origins of the various hangings and statuary with a voice filled with love for each one. Several times he lingered and had to be nudged along by Winston. "This one—circa 11,947—was one of the few artifacts to be found in the ruins of Altair Three after the nova. Notice the glaze, the cracks in it. Very lovely, no?"

"Fine, fine," Winston agreed and handled the object absently. Impossible now to tell for what use, if any, it had been originally intended. It had the speckled appearance of superheated and flash-frozen pottery of Earth. For this he hadn't

traveled to the center of the galaxy. He replaced it carefully on the stand and passed the next half dozen vases, plaques, and statues without a second glance. He paused long enough to buy an impressionistic statue of a six-footed horse done in iridescent black ivory. "Not," he told PonTasfil shortly, "that it has any specific merit, but it has nice tactile qualities."

PonTasfil nodded in agreement and caressed the figurine gently. "There is no explaining what pleases the senses," he murmured. His slender fingers entwined and he gazed enraptured before a tall, wooden carved and inlaid pillar. "This," he said, "came from the Temple of the Seven Bulls. Atura is our name for the sun. See how the figures grow in stature, each corresponding to increased enlightenment of the artists. It was over four thousand years in the making."

WINSTON was intrigued in spite of himself. The pillar was too big, of course—no question of adding it to the collection—but it was appealing. The minute carving was per-

fectly executed, the periods separated by the inlaid stones and pieces of gold, also carved exquisitely. He turned with new respect to PonTasfil and eyed him curiously, "How'd you get it?"

"Oh, it was an exchange. Naturally it couldn't have been bought. For that I had to part with three Doves of the West, an Osiris from your Earth, and an anelji bowl from my own land. But it was a good bargain."

Winston gasped audibly as PonTasfil glibly rolled the priceless articles from his tongue. Reluctantly he turned from the pillar finally, conceding to himself that even if he could make a trade or offer enough cash, it would be impossible to get it home.

"This now," PonTasfil's voice was hushed and he approached the dais reverently, "is the gem of the entire collection. You have heard of them, haven't you? The Living Urns of Tularn?"

Winston controlled the quaking of his hands and accepted the urn from the elderly dealer. The Living Urn! He gazed at the carvings that adorned the

sides of the shallow bowl and before his eyes they seemed to be alive. Human in form, they danced and played and frolicked in a world that appeared three dimensional, but was not of his world. Involuntarily he glanced inside and with irritation became aware of the understanding smile of the dealer. Coldly he said, "I heard that not everyone can see it."

"True," the old man answered, "there are some who say there is nothing at all out of the ordinary about them. Of course, most of it is in the eye of the viewer—but even so, it's a pity such an amazing art is now lost to us. There are only three of them, you know."

"SO I heard." Winston regretfully replaced the urn on the dais and backed from it a step and then another. Finally—it seemed that proximity was a requisite for the life—the figures were stilled again, and the urn was an ordinary, gray carved bit of pottery. Like his. The fury inside him was a cold, intense core as he noted how similar the object now was to the piece he had traveled thousands of light

years to find. Abruptly he turned from it and demanded, "Mr. PonTasfil, how much? I want to buy it."

"Oh, Mr. Winston, I am sorry. I thought you knew. I can't."

"Can't? What do you mean, can't? Anything has a price."

"But that goes to the public domain after my demise. The Galactic Federation declared it property of the Federation, along with the other two. It will be put on display for all of civilization to see and admire. As a matter of fact, this one is to be sent to your Earth government first."

"Nonsense!" Winston eyed the old man steadily, his tone peremptory, "You name the price and I'll meet it, regardless of what it is."

"Please, Mr. Winston. Perhaps we should leave now." As Winston advanced toward him, he motioned almost imperceptibly and immediately two uniformed robots wheeled into the room to join them. "See to the order," he said, relief making his voice shake. And turning to Winston he apologized, "I really must leave now. You are welcome to return any time

before your departure. Your order will be delivered to your ship."

Winston stood as if frozen for another five seconds and then sagged beneath his flowing cloak. Consciously he unclenched his fingers that had knotted into fists and without a word he turned and strode from the gallery.

BACK AT his ship, Winston stood eyeing his imitation urn with hatred. "Suckered all down the line," he muttered to himself. "All the little clues that led to it planted, the air of resignation at having to part with it. Amalti's tears. The secrecy. Planted and faked." With a sweeping motion he swept the urn from the table. Too late now to return and get his money back; they'd be gone anyway. How carefully they had planned it all. From the first whispered hint that an urn was for sale, throughout the transaction, there had been not even a fragmentary doubt in his mind that finally he had stumbled onto the one item that would make him the envy of the entire universe. A Living Urn. His alone.

He felt old and tired suddenly and automatically groped for the mirror he kept on a tiny gold chain about his neck. His face examined him back and there was no line, no blemish on the carefully-tended skin. His hair was crisp and dark and his teeth white and straight. Not yet, at any rate, had the change started. But it would, and he'd have to be back on Earth when it did. Two years, he calculated rapidly, and he'd need treatment again. Inexorably the years took their toll, despite the expensive treatments that had to be renewed every five years.

He hadn't meant to linger here—only stop and inspect the collection of PonTasfil, and drop a carefully veiled hint that he possessed the Living Urn. Just a hint. And now here, how could he leave? This world didn't practice rejuvenation as civilized planets did, but then the inhabitants had a normal life span of close to three hundred years. PonTasfil must be nearing his end to speak so resignedly of passing the urn over to the Federation, Winston thought savagely. If he were a younger man, it

would be as reprehensible to him as it was to Winston. Art such as that wasn't for the masses to gawk at, but for the elite who knew what they were looking at, and understood what soul went into it, and what price came with it. And sending it to a backward planet like Earth was like burying it alive. Not that it would ever get there, of course. It would be hijacked and sold at black market (as he had assumed concerning the one he had purchased) and end up in some egomaniac's private collection.

THE BITTERNESS of his mood kept him from enjoying the excellent meal his robots prepared and served and for the most part the food went back untasted. Again and again his eyes strayed to the upturned mockery that would make his name the laughing stock of connoisseurs everywhere. They would say his name with a sneer and tell and re-tell how he had been taken in by the fake urn. How could he have made such a fool of himself? They must have drugged him at first to make

him so positive the figures moved. In a drugged state, with his mind open to suggestion, he had thought they lived and hadn't even hesitated when they named the staggering price. That for a copy made of river mud!

That was what the idiotic masses should see. How would they know what it was? To their simple, susceptible minds the figures would probably appear to writhe and wiggle. In his anger he forgot the nights he had sat before his copy and convinced himself that he saw the movements.

Slowly an idea formed in his mind and presently he lifted the bowl from the floor and examined it carefully. A chip had come out of it along the rim, but he was skilled enough to repair that without it being noticed at a casual glance. He placed it on a white cloth and backed away from it narrowing his eyes as he studied it. It could be a twin of the one he had seen in PonTasfil's gallery—from a distance, at any rate.

It would take time. PonTasfil had been frightened by him and wouldn't be likely to let down his guard soon. Time. He

frowned and again inspected himself in the small mirror. Four months at the most. Deep sleep would delay the process, but wouldn't halt it. Eighteen years to return home. Involuntarily he shuddered at the thought of adding eighteen years to his life and with a start of fear, realized it would most likely kill him. But in deep sleep it would be no more than two years. That was running terribly close. He hesitated over his plan, weighing the danger against the gain. At his age, if allowed to age, even a month could do irreparable damage to his brain, or his heart. There were limits to the abilities of the doctors once the damage had been done. They could forestall it with their skills, but after it had been done, they couldn't actually undo it. But for the Living Urn

ABRUPTLY he decided that a few months—if he ran over the five years—couldn't harm him too much if he gained the urn. Surely the doctors had foreseen that there might be unavoidable delays, and set the time accordingly—

like the emergency fuels and food supplies all ships carried, but never used or counted in their calculations.

He sat until the morning hours were very near, combing through his new collection for a suitable gift for PonTasfil. Not too expensive, or it would only heighten his suspicions; but it had to be worthy of the quite fabulous collection the old man already had. With a grimace of pain he finally selected a miniature Bootes flower god. Jealously he ran his fingers over the glowing petals and his eyes closed dreamily as the sensation of pleasure crept through him. The sentient flowers of Bootes were admired and coveted by nearly every other planet in the universe, but away from their native soil they died, so only their likenesses were ever seen by non travelers. Winston guessed shrewdly that PonTasfil's travels had been limited, and he had yet to see the astounding array of flowers on parade. The miniature did manage to convey some of the spectacle of the scene. In the midst of the flowers stood the tree-like god of plant sentience, and all

were magnificently done in the colors of the originals. Having made his decision—albeit a grudging one—he retired.

The next weeks were uneventfully spent in inspecting any and all art treasures he could find. And only after a month had passed did he contact PonTasfil again. Then he made a brief visit, during which he was very careful to show no special interest in the urn, still conspicuously displayed in the center of the collection opposite the entrance. Diffidently he invited PonTasfil to examine his collection and, as if an afterthought, included dinner aboard his ship in the invitation.

PonTasfil's acceptance was hesitant and he was aloofly polite until after the dinner ended and the storage room was opened. In a surprised tone, he expressed deep admiration for the varied items Winston displayed for him. He listened avidly when Winston accounted his many travels and described various throne rooms hung with stunning tapestries and adorned with rare jewels and precious metals. The two art lovers talked long into the

night and set another date when they parted.

IN DUE time, after many such visits and conversations, Winston felt he had regained the confidence of the old man; and when he called for him at his gallery he had the miniature under his cloak. It was in a large box and with some ceremony he presented it to PonTasfil.

"No, no, I am not selling it, my friend. A gift for you." He motioned about him with a deprecatory smile, "Not that it can equal your own magnificent display, but it has its own charm."

"Ah, yes," murmured the old man deeply moved by the beauty of the carving, "It is beautiful, beautiful." He smiled gently at Winston and asked almost shyly, "And, my friend, what can I give you in exchange?"

Winston swallowed hard several times and grasped the frail shoulder of the other man, "You have already given me all I require. You have been a good, true friend to a lonely man far away from his home. I shall always remember and

treasure your kindness to me." He turned and wiped at his eyes and said more brusquely, "Now you said something about a dance form unique among the mountain folk. Shall we go?" He placed the box on the floor and the two men left the gallery.

They used Winston's flyer to attend the dancing and later when Winston apologized for having to return to his ship for medication, PonTasfil was concerned. "Oh, it is nothing," Winston reassured him. "For digestion. I forgot them earlier and now feel the consequences of my lack of foresight." His cloak billowed about him as he entered the port and again moments later when he reappeared. Again he made regretful excuses for the delay and turned the flyer toward the gallery.

He agreed to a very small glass of PonTasfil's excellent wine after only a pretense of reluctance. "I would like to have another look at that amazing pillar before I leave," he murmured and strolled toward it with his hands clasped behind him under the cloak. Very quickly he re-

placed the copy of the urn he was carrying beneath his cloak with the Living Urn, and—continued down toward the pillar. After a few moments he rejoined PonTasfil before the miniature and they raised their glasses in a silent toast.

"I AM so sorry you will be leaving so soon," PonTasfil broke the silence sadly.

"A pity, but all trips must end. For the next few days I shall be busy getting my supplies in order and then off for home. But you will join me for dinner two nights from now, won't you?"

"Thank you, my friend. An honor."

"I must be on my way now. Ah, the box. I'll take it back out of your way." The movement that picked up the box also deposited the urn inside, and very casually he slipped it under his arm and walked to the door with his host. "Two days then," he said with a wave and got in his flyer.

There was a flurry of activity when he boarded his ship. The port was sealed and the robot computer depressed series of buttons that activated

the engine while another began the testing that preceded the deep sleep process. Six hours later, Winston was gazing at the screen that showed the diamond studded black of space. The robot wheeled a table toward him and he cheerfully stretched out on it shifting only once to be sure his long sleep should be a comfortable one. He had added but two and a half months, an infinitesimal time actually.

IN PONTASFIL'S back room, the Federation man nodded in satisfaction as the ship he was watching on a screen seemed to shimmer and blink out. "Drive's on," he announced. "It'll be safe for the next eighteen years. And by that time perhaps we'll have got those highjackers."

PonTasfil's smile was rueful as he flicked off the screen, "And I have to take that weekly injection for the next eighteen years."

"Sorry, sir," the uniformed man said, "But we have to keep everyone thinking you still have the Living Urn until we know it's safe, so we have to keep you...uh, intact. As it

is now, they'll all believe that Winston's going home with a clever copy and no one will bother about him, but as soon as any of them get a good chance to examine yours, they will put two and two together."

PonTasfil shrugged philosophically, "I'll have it encased tomorrow and then pretend I have the greatest art treasure ever created by man whenever anyone wants to see the Urn, while that scoundrel enjoys it himself."

"I don't think he'll be around to do much enjoying of anything. The customs people will be waiting for him with proof that he hasn't paid a duty for over a hundred years. That will automatically cancel his rejuvenation treatments. And until then, he'll be in deep sleep."

"Oh," PonTasfil said simply, "I don't think so. When I last had dinner with him I diluted his deep sleep injection. I think he'll be waking up in, roughly, six months. Just think, seventeen years plus aboard his ship in which to enjoy the lovely art treasure he has gone to such pains to collect."



“the principle”, revisited

Special Feature

*by A. BERTRAM
CHANDLER*

NUMEROUS science fiction readers are having a great deal of fun in correspondence columns with what is called “Finagle’s Law”. As one learned Editor is a graduate of M. I. T., and as most of his readers seem to be scientists, engineers and tech-

nicians much of the correspondence is being maintained on a remarkably high plane and quite a number of the letters printed abound in abstruse mathematical formulae. Finagle’s Law, however, seems to boil down to just this: *If anything can go wrong, it will.*

Finagle’s Law operates powerfully in everyday life as well as in scientific experiments and the like. Some time ago, as a matter of fact, I wrote a short story called “The Principle” in which I dealt with what I called the Principle of Natural Cussedness. It was published; but Finagle’s Law seems to be no more than an elaboration of my own Principle.

Many examples of the working of the Principle spring readily to mind. Any seaman will tell you that the prevailing winds in any part of the world are head winds. Anybody who has two, or more, similar keys on a ring will find that the last key he tries will be the one to fit the lock that he is attempting to open. Anybody who is in a real hurry will find that the obstacles strewn in his path are too many to be accounted for by the Laws of Random.

With reference to the above, and assuming that, in addition to being in a hurry, you are lost, the validity of either one of two axioms will be established as soon as you ask the only passer-by within sight for directions:

-1- He will be a stranger here himself.

-2- He will be a newly-arrived immigrant without a word of English. (A combination of -1- and -2- is, of course, highly probable.)

My wife, however, recently discovered yet a third axiom. It was, perhaps, inevitable that she do so since she is multilingual, it being very unlikely that -2- could ever apply in her case.

ON THE DAY of the great discovery I was returning from Melbourne to Sydney by air—a flight of about two hours' duration—my plane being due to arrive at Mascot at 7:00 p.m. On the same day she, as usual, went to work in the family car, a vehicle with a quite pleasing outward aspect but, at times, unreliable inwards. On her way to the fac-

tory of which she is production manager—it is on the outskirts of Sydney and very inconveniently situated as regards public transport—she picked up her usual three passengers, members of her staff. At 4:30 p.m. work was finished for the day and she, with her passengers, proceeded homewards. In the normal course of events she would have arrived home at 5:30 p.m., giving her time to relax and, perhaps, to put dinner in the oven before coming out to the airport to meet me.

The car, however, decided to break down miles from anywhere. One of the passengers was sent trudging to the nearest telephone box, there to request aid from the motorists' association of which my wife is a member. Aid was a long time coming, the reason for this being an error in the transmission of radio orders to the breakdown van. The driver of the van cruised up and down for twenty minutes on the south side of a railway bridge, hunting in vain for the car which was, of course, broken down on the north side of the bridge. After more telephoning, this situation was ironed out, but

the temporary repairs took a long time.

Having deposited her passengers, at long last, at the nearest convenient public transport my wife found that she had no time to go home; she had barely time enough to get to Mascot by 7:00 p.m. She decided to take short cuts—invariably a fatal decision—and soon became lost. She stopped and asked the first passer-by for directions.

He was not a stranger here himself.

He was not a newly-arrived immigrant without a word of English.

He was something almost as bad—the victim of a terrible stammer—and it took him all of fifteen minutes to say that any road to the right would do.

EVEN THEN, the night's troubles were far from over. The first road to the right was a one way street and my wife, of course, was going the wrong way. Having disentangled herself from this situation she came roaring into the airport at almost supersonic speed just as a plane, which she assumed to be the Mel-

bourne flight, was landing. (The Melbourne plane, of course, had been ordered to hang off for fifteen minutes and was cruising over Sydney...) She saw a disembarking passenger who, from the rear, looked like me. She left the car and chased after him, yelling out my name and getting more and more infuriated when he did not reply. She finally caught up with him just as he was boarding the airlines coach...

Her natural assumption then was that I had not travelled on the 5:00 p.m. flight from Melbourne and that there would be a telegram waiting for her at home to advise her of this. Fortunately she made a few enquiries and discovered that the Melbourne plane was yet to arrive.

I was rather surprised and pained by the chilliness of my reception.

This, however, could be accounted for by one last axiom of the Principle of Natural Cussedness:

No matter what jam your wife gets into, and no matter where you are at the time, it is *ALL YOUR FAULT*.

**travelers
far
and
wee**

by Donald

E. Westlake

**A Fable of
Futurity**

R OGER TURNED right on Eighth Avenue from Fourteenth Street and drove uptown. Phil was asleep in the seat on his right. Roger readjusted himself behind the wheel, cut between two cabs, barely missed a truck, gradually worked the car—this year's Oldsmobile, with the latest sanitary equipment—over to the left-hand side of the road. Eighth Avenue is one way, uptown, and Roger drove along the farthest lane over to the left. The lights were staggered, and Roger pushed the car at just under thirty miles an hour, clicking across each intersection just as the light snapped green.

He turned left on Forty Fifth Street, crossed Ninth Avenue, followed Forty Fifth Street down to the end, turned right and drove up the ramp to the Parkway. He speeded up to thirty five miles an hour, and glanced over at Phil. The poor guy was still asleep.

At One Hundred Seventy Fifth Street, Roger turned off and took the approach to the George Washington bridge. He drove across the bridge, rolled the window down, dropped a fifty cent piece into the toll

taker's hand. Rolling the window back up, he pulled out among the Jersey traffic.

Roger appeared to be about forty. Since it was a chill October day, he wore a tailored herringbone tweed topcoat, a gray hat and tan gloves. His face was full-fleshed, but not puffy. He didn't wear glasses, and he looked like a successful businessman.

Phil, asleep on the seat beside him, wore approximately the same clothing. Although his face had its own individuality, it gave the same impression as did Roger's. A man of means, an executive, a man who gives commands, a man of business and foresight and a good income.

Roger swooped the gray Olds halfway round a cloverleaf, swung gently and smoothly into a turn-off, barely touched the power brakes, and the car purringly decelerated as he drove into the tiny Jersey town.

The bank was on the main road of town. Roger turned into the driveway and parked behind the car waiting by the drive-in teller's window. He

took out checkbook and pen, wrote out a check to cash, and when his turn came, drove up to the window, rolled down the window at his side, and handed the check in to the teller. After a minute, the teller pushed a wad of greenbacks out to him. Roger took the money, tossed it carelessly on the seat between himself and Philip, rolled up the window, and drove around the modest brick bank building, out to the street, and turned back the way he had come.

ANOTHER fifty cents to the man at the tollgate, and Roger drove the car swiftly back across the bridge. This time, he took the "Local Streets" exit, turned north, drove until he came to the drive-in restaurant. He parked before the neon-coated, modernistic, glassed-in building, and waited until the chilly girl carhop came over to take his order. He asked for a hamburger, a cup of coffee, apple pie with ice cream. The carhop went away, and Roger picked up the cash that had been lying on the seat, counted it, shoved it into

the glove compartment with the rest of the money there, except for one ten dollar bill, and put that bill on top of the dashboard.

He ate his meal, handed the ten dollars to the carhop, and said, "Keep the change." He knew when he said it that it was a stupid thing to do, but he didn't really care. He backed out to the highway, leaving the carhop stunned behind him, and headed back toward the city.

He glanced at his watch. Almost four thirty. He had to get downtown soon. He drove down Ninth Avenue, keeping to the left, turned onto Fourteenth Street, over to Lexington, turned uptown again, cutting off a cab that was coming the other way on Fourteenth Street, and held traffic up for quite a while during which he executed some complicated maneuvering, making a left turn into Seventeenth Street.

At Seventeenth and Fifth, he had to stop for a red light. The light turned green, but he sat there daydreaming. A car behind him honked, raucously, impatiently. Roger came to

with a start, stalled the engine, got it going again, and turned right on Fifth.

The honking had awakened Phil. He sat up, blinking, rubbing his eyes, and said, "What time is it?"

"Not quite five."

"I might as well stay awake then." Phil looked out at the traffic and the crowds of pedestrians. "Pretty crowded," he said.

"Getting close to the Christmas shopping rush," said Roger.

"That's true. That's going to be a real mess."

"I'm not looking forward to it."

THEY DROVE in silence for a while. They went into Central Park, circled it, came out on West Seventy Second, turned right, drove up to One Hundred Twenty Fifth, turned right again, over to Seventh Avenue, headed back downtown.

They had a terrible time getting through Times Square. A cab driver rolled his window down and cursed Roger in two languages. Roger maintained

his dignity, stared straight ahead, drove on downtown.

As they turned into Fourteenth Street, Phil broke the silence. He waved out at all the traffic surrounding them, and said, "I wonder how many of them are like us."

Roger shrugged. "More every day, I suppose."

"Makes you stop and think."

"It does that."

They headed up Fifth Avenue again, amid the cabs and the groaning buses. As they crossed Forty Seventh, Phil said, "It's six o'clock."

"All right," said Roger. "I'm rather tired."

THEY WERE stopped by a red light at Forty Eighth. Roger put the emergency brake on and slid over to the right. Phil clambered over him and got behind the wheel. He didn't get there before the light changed. A cab behind blatted its horn at them.

Phil released the emergency brake and started forward, slowly. The cab blatted again. Phil swerved erratically, barely missing a cab on his right.

Roger relaxed in his seat,

leaning against the right-hand door. "I cashed another check this afternoon," he said.

"How much do we have left?"

"I don't know. Millions."

At Fifty Ninth, they were stuck behind a car trying to make a left turn. Phil laughed. "I bet *he's* one of us."

"More every day," murmured Roger. His eyes were closed.

They continued uptown, turned left at Seventy Second, over to Ninth Avenue, turned downtown.

Phil watched the other traffic. His face was tired, lonely, wistful. He watched the pedestrians hurrying along the sidewalk, bumping into one another, cursing one another, straining to be first to the corner.

They crossed Fifty Ninth Street just after the light changed. A cab slammed on its brakes. Phil looked in the rear view mirror, watched the cab cross the intersection. He smiled, faintly. He said, "Do you suppose we'll *ever* be able to get out of the car?"

But Roger didn't answer. He was asleep.

PARODIES TOSSED

IMMORTALITY, C. O. D.

by Bret Hooper

The sky was sequined velvet, before the dawn of day;
The car was a hurtling rocket, along the straightaway;
The road was a ribbon of concrete, over the Jersey plains,
And Thomas Blaine was driving
Driving, driving
Our hero Tom was driving, about to spill his brains.

He saw the headlights approaching. He knew he was going
to crash—
His head went through the windshield, his knee went through
the dash.
The steering column impaled him; but who should be
waiting there,
But the great Rex Corporation,
The huge Rex Corporation,
To snatch him into the future, and cheat death by a hair.

He woke in a different body, our hero Thomas Blaine;
It seems that Rex has saved him to promote an ad campaign.

Now they have him, they're scared to use him, so they set him
 free in New York,
 But trouble for Tom is brewing,
 For Tom doesn't know what he's doing,
 And the first man he meets up with is the villain, Carl Orc.

Now gather round, you readers; the lecture's about to begin:
 The background is pretty complex, so here's where you get
 filled in.

Carl shows Tom the sights of the city, they take a tour of
 the bars —

Now the plot begins to thicken

As Tom begins to sicken;

Car Orc has doped his whiskey, and our boy Tom sees stars.

And now for Part Two of the lecture, delivered by Tom's new
 friend Ray:

Carl Orc deals in black market bodies; He has Tom and Ray
 stashed away.

With the history lesson completed, good old Rex comes and
 sets our boy free

To witness the reincarnation,

Of the head of the Rex Corporation,

To give us the rest of the background, and finish the lecture
 (Part Three.)

The reincarnation's a fizzle. Something is seriously wrong:
 The body turns into a zombie, because it's been vacant too long.
 The zombie walks straight to our hero, and he says: "Tom,
 take a good look;

Look for me by daylight,

Watch for me by starlight,

I'll follow thee forever, or at least to the end of the book."

Tom sleeps with Marie Thorne of Rex Corp., and looks for
 a job the next day;

Somewhat later a poltergeist haunts him, and the zombie helps chase it away.

Before haunting, Tom worked as a hunter, with a bayonetted rif—

le, but he yearns for something finer,

Becomes a junior yacht designer,

And going home from work he meets his body's ex-owner's wife.

One day an old woman knocks at Tom's door, to tell him hereafter is hell;

Then a few minutes later a salesman calls, who says he has nothing to sell;

He offers Tom free hereafter insurance, which Tom accepts with a will —

He takes the treatment gladly,

And thinks he hasn't done badly,

Till he learns from Marie that insuring him gives Rex the right to kill

him. Now we have the usual chase and the usual hair's-breadth escape —

Marie works with former villain Orc to bail Tom out of this scrape:

They quick-freeze his body and send it away in a shipment of frozen meat,

But his mind would be detected

When the frozen beef was inspected,

So his mind's sent by transplant from body to body — Rex's killers go down to defeat.

Tom's mind rejoins his body at last in the isles of the southern sea.

A job awaits him, designing yachts, and he marries sweet Marie,

But their troubles aren't over: the zombie shows up, and now he remembers his name,

So with freedom barely tasted,

They find their escape was wasted,

The zombie's the other man killed in the crash — says Tom and Marie are to blame.

So Tom gives the zombie his body. On the threshold he's joined by Marie;

They die happily ever hereafter, but this threshold is what puzzles me:

Here is therebefore to the threshold, which is *herebefore* to the hereafter, hence

If the threshold's therebefore the hereafter,

Then the hereafter must be thereafter,

Therefore after herebefore, but therebefore the hereafter, whenafter is whereafter whence?

What was the secret of the cult of handsome young men surrounding the luscious Laura Clock? Why did a priest want Simon Ark to follow a seminary student, declining to suggest why? What was the connection between all this and murder by cannon? Don't miss this latest adventure of Simon Ark

The Case of the Mystic Mistress

by Edward D. Hoch

You'll find it complete in the May issue of



DOUBLE • ACTION
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Magazine

Now on sale at all stands

the
alien
vibration

by HANNES BOK

He followed the will-o-the-wisp to a strange world — a world distant, yet near. But why did the alien ones remember him?

FRANK ROGERS first heard the tortured wailing when he was sitting alone by his hearthstone, cosily dreaming before a dying fire. Instinctively he glanced sideways, then chuckled—for of course no one else was present. Sparks snapped in the fire. Had he been dreaming? He relaxed; the wind's whispering around the eaves soothed him. It was night in scarlet autumn.

All that day the man had been out in the woods near his home, his eyes feasting on the gaudy, frost-tinted foliage, his ears filling with the music of the sighing wind as it stripped the trees. His nostrils had dilated to catch the sweet scent of the deep-drifted dry leaves, through which he had waded as though through rustling dry water, s p a t t e r i n g him with flakes of fragrant foam.

He had stood on the hilltop, stretching his hands up to the soft turquoise blue of the heavens, had flung the gates of his senses wide open to receive the beauty of this day. Then, in the dim afterglow, he had returned home, tranquil. His house was a shadow in the dusk; entering it, he lit a fire, dined, and went

to the hearth. Hearing the outcry at his side, he turned, found himself alone, and decided that it had been a trick of his imagination.

THE WHIMPERING began again—not petulant; despairing, rather, as if the being from which it came was no longer able to restrain itself. It was the kind of cry that no one could possibly ignore. Rogers extended his hand, touched nothing, stood up and looked around, still seeing no one. He went over to a wall and snapped on a light, banished the flickering shadows set in motion by the fire. The only living thing in that room was himself.

Yet the sound had ceased as he had arisen, as if their maker had been silenced by surprise or apprehension. But now, as Rogers shook his head, puzzled, the lament was resumed.

The man again explored the place from which the moaning seemed to emanate; though he found nothing, the sound slurred at the movement into a pleased gurgling, as when an infant's tears give way to chortling at its parents' attention. Then a pause, and a rapid flow

of tones. Words? If so, in a tongue unknown to Rogers—though, as he listened they became oddly familiar, as if he had memorized them long ago, then forgotten them. Plainly they questioned; he stepped backward uncertainly. The query was repeated, this time haltingly, as if to allow the man ample chance to comprehend every syllable; he shrugged, baffled. If he were not dreaming, this thing must be a ghost...

Ghost? Or some alien presence; he rejected the supernatural. This would be the first he had ever encountered. Most of his life had been spent in crowded cities, where the atmosphere was too confused by conflicting currents of thought for delicate otherworld perceptions; here the air was clearer, and in opening his senses to the day's loveliness, might he not also have opened them to—something else?

THE INQUIRY was repeated—a third time, impatiently, now. The man could not bring himself to answer it: words boiled in his mind, but speaking them amounted to talking to himself. There was a

burst of exclamation from the unseen intruder, then a coy pleading, wheedling. At last Rogers spoke.

"Go away! I don't know who or what you are—and you make me nervous. Try bothering someone else, please."

An upward inflection of surprise answered him, shading into eager earnestness.

"You may as well go away," the man furthered. "I can't understand what you're saying. . . I was perfectly happy until you came along!"

The reassuring murmur which replied began beside the man and ended at the door; it was as if the speaker had walked, talking, from Rogers' side across the room to the entrance. The last notes were insistent.

"No use; I don't fathom you," the man said.

A GAIN THE response across from beside him, leisurely approaching the door. He followed it. Immediately, triumphantly, it passed through the door and called from outside. For a clock's tick, Rogers hesitated, then stepped out into the night, heeding the invisible

voice. It sped ahead at once, pleased and promising; he went after it.

So they went on, the sound summoning, the man pursuing it until he was deep in the whispering woods, stumbling through the night. Over the tissue-paper rustle of trampled leaves the voice nuanced from a continual stream of words to an occasional evocative hoot—now at one side of the man, now on the other, guiding him. Rogers knew the woods well—and so did the garrulous presence, for carefully it steered him away from gullies and tangled underbrush. Not even a low-hanging branch barred the way.

They reached the summit of the hill and the presence fell silent. Over the man curved the blue-black sky, powdered with stars. The cold breeze, plucking at Rogers' garments, riffling his hair, was like a playful hand, teasing. . .

Looking skyward at the points of light, the man felt that he had merely to stretch his arms wide to launch himself off the hill's crest into infinity. . .

Peace; the calm of eternity. Hypnotic. Rogers forgot where

he was, even that he existed. There was only a mesmeric sensation of restful serenity...

HE HEARD the muted babbling of many childish voices, and the one which had summoned him was murmuring, "It is all right, now. He can hear us and understand what we are saying. His eyes will see us."

Rogers felt a light hand on his arm; with difficulty he tore his gaze from the fascination of the stars and turned to see what had touched him. At first he was aware only of a diffused mellow glow filled with drifting splotches of golden effulgence; then he perceived that the moving lights were blurred mirthful faces like those of half-remembered children.

The gentle glimmer issued in all directions from a landscape of light. Prismatic trees and hills, restless forms of luminescence. The nearest objects were most clear; those farther away merged into the gleaming haze. The variations of hue and intensity blended into a splendid ambrous harmony.

Rogers could discern, scattered about, fragile pavilions

rising out of rainbow glamors. Every glance disclosed something until then unseen. Abruptly he was startled: as he regarded admiringly a clump of diversely colored flowers, it dimmed and vanished! Like a fadeout on a cinema screen.

ONE OF THE hills dissolved into nothingness; in its place foamed an amethyst sea on which magic islands appeared and disintegrated. The sea rolled away beyond ken: Frank was looking into a canyon of malachite...

"Mirage," he murmured and heard laughter; the drifting faces concentrated around him. Misty wide eyes, blue and amber, dwelt amusedly on him. Slender hands lifted in graceful gestures of disdain out of trailing half-visible lilac draperies.

"He thinks it's not real!" the faces murmured. "Let's prove to him that he's wrong!"

Fingers gentle as thistledown prodded him; little wispy forms raced ahead of him as somnambulistically he allowed himself to be goaded forward. He stumbled over a shrub which suddenly sprouted in front of him and which disappeared as

he awoke from his trance to glance disapproval at it.

A voice cautioned. "Remember, our mother is waiting! We mustn't detain him too long!" Rogers scanned the speaker, a little ruby wraith spangled with brassy glints. It danced tantalizingly close to him, eluding his clumsy attempts to grasp it.

"You are. . .?" he asked, and it replied, "Shi-Voysieh, child of Yarra, The Woman."

"Yarra?" the man queried.

"You will see her very soon."

"And these?" Rogers indicated the other child-faces.

"They too are Yarra's children," Shi-Voysieh answered. "Our brothers. . .and sisters."

AT EVERY new phantasmagorical manifestation, Rogers observed that the shining-visaged children pointed three fingers in its direction.

"And why do you do that?" he asked of Shi-Voysieh.

"And that is. . .?"

"B'Kuth, The Man." Again Shi-Voysieh reverently performed the ceremonial salute.

Frank had no opportunity for further inquiry, for just then the ground was swept from under his feet and he found

himself tumbling on the surface of a tempestuous lake which tossed him about violently. The waves looked like water, but they felt like rubber and were perfectly dry. After a hasty ritual of homage, the children scampered nimbly from the crest of one gigantic comber to another shrieking delightedly if a sudden billow tumbled them. They clustered about the man giggling at his confusion.

Then in a breath, the waves whisked away, leaving an endless azure sky in which the children darted about joyously, uttering glad cries, like birds. There was nothing but the blue of sheer atmosphere. Rogers did not realize then that all of these disconcerting phenomena were being intelligently produced for the purpose of bewildering him. The children preferred frisking about to explaining the cause of Rogers' plight; perhaps they deemed explication unnecessary.

ONLY THE man's struggles to breathe in an uprush of air, and the dwindling forms of the children, told him that he was falling. He shouted with panic—and discovered that he

was quite safe in a hammock swinging among the treetops, while above him the children were enthusiastically cavorting on puffs of cloud: "These're ice-floes, and I'll be a bloodhound and chase you, if you want to be Eliza!"

As Rogers relaxed, panting, the hammock dissolved; he was seated on pavement at the foot of an immense white stairway; at its summit the children were impatiently hailing him. Beyond them loomed a marvellous edifice of translucent milky stone; its spires faded into the mists of sky, and nebulous forms were discernible moving within it. Rogers had undergone enough of the whirlwind changes, and refused to ascend the stair until the children assured him that there would not very likely be any further trouble.

He climbed high and higher. Whiffs of vapor puffed up from the white steps, enveloping him like languorously-cast veils; they thickened, obliterating everything. Rogers felt the children's hands patting him. Then long pale fingers drew the mist aside as though parting a pair of curtains, and he looked up into the somber eyes

of Yarra, The Woman.

SHE WAS seated on a throne of white stone and was indistinct, as though seen through waxed glass. All of twenty feet tall, she was robed in clinging cloudy white which trailed into the mist and merged with it. Her oval face was margined with sleek yellow tresses that flowed over her shoulders. For eyes she had dark stars; her slender nose was negligible; her mouth a rosy pucker. Her flesh had the sheen of pearl and the veins pulsing at her temples, throat and wrists were like pale blue roots...

Reaching down, she lifted the man into her lap as though he were a kitten. Involuntarily he nestled against her warm bosom, breathing the delicious femininity which scented her clothing; then he drew away in embarrassment and sat tensely erect. The woman's eyes softened; she smiled understandingly.

"So you're the one whom Shi-Voysieh has been following," she murmured; at the mention of his name, the ruby-swathed presence flitted up to the pair and sat on The Woman's fore-

arm, clinging to her. Rogers shared his gaze with them both, comparing them: there was a disturbing sameness about them which he dismissed as a family resemblance, not suspecting the truth.

SHI-VOYSIEH petulantly informed him. "For a very long time I have watched you, but you never saw me, never heard me. I told this-our-mother about you, and asked if I could not bring you to her, since you seemed so appreciative of beauty. For awhile she would not consent. She said that you would be confused, away from your own scheme of things...and she said that if you were aware of this world of ours, you could enter it unaided. Then in the red woods I caught you with all your senses receptive—but I could not make myself known above the day's wonder. So I followed you to your home and waited—but it seemed too late. You could not feel nor hear me. In my despair I cried out, and then you heard! But poorly. So I have led you here and asked our-mother-Yarra's help—and it is by her strength of will

that you are kept with us."

Rogers looked for confirmation from The Woman; she nodded. He thought, "Shi-Voy-sieh mentioned a Man. . .if this is The Woman, what must The Man be like?" As if he had spoken the thought, Shi-Voy-sieh shrank away; The Woman's face hardened as if at a bitter thought, then became gentle again. All around Rogers was a flutter and scurrying of agitated children.

"Was it such a dreadful thing to think?" he queried.

THE WOMAN'S gaze was reproachful. "When you are aware of Him—do honor to Him." She herself made the ceremonial salute which the children used.

"It's a strange custom. I didn't understand," Rogers explained, and she saw the children exchange worried glances at this.

"I know, and I forgive," The Woman answered, assuaging him with a caress of her long fingers. "You ask of The Man: His name is B'Kuth." She eyed him as if he had known and she was reminding him. "He is a mystery—to know B'Kuth and for what He stands would be

to comprehend the riddle of Life itself." Speaking The Man's name, she made the reverent sign. "No mere mind like yours could understand such an intensity of knowledge as to realize B'Kuth. To understand The Man is to have become—The Man!"

"And—you?" Rogers asked.

"I?" She threw back her head; at her sudden horrible laughter, the children screamed, wildly scattering into the mist, leaving Yarra and Rogers alone. "I am only one whom He has exalted. "

For a moment she looked away, her face a cold mask; then she quickly set Rogers down and arose, turning from him to go. He put up his hands to stay her.

"Don't go! Please!" he cried. She did not look at him, and he was afraid that she had not heard, that she had forgotten him. But after a pause, she said, "I cannot take you with me, for I go now to—Him; I am His mate, you know." And again her terrible laughter flared.

SHE MASTERED her emotion, bent more calmly over

him. "Do as you wish until I return. Create whatever you desire. That's the law here, you know—to create, to imitate B'Kuth. You don't know what I mean? Why, look: suppose you desire food! Then, imagine its qualities. Describe its appearance in the air with your hands—visualize it until you almost think it is before you.

Rogers shook his head helplessly. Biting her underlip—and he sensed her impatience—she knelt before him.

"Now watch," she said. "I wish for a fruit. It must be round, transparent, purple and pithy. Not sweet, nor bitter, but with a haunting undertaste of drowsiness. . ." and as she spoke, her cupped hands apparently fondled an invisible globe in mid-air. Suddenly the fruit which she had described materialized between her palms. She dropped it beside her—it fell with a thud—and she motioned imperiously to Rogers. "Now, do something like that," she said.

He closed his eyes. "I'd like to make a cloth," he said, gesturing. "A very large piece. Weightless. Like strands of

woven green fire, with little vine-embroideries. . ."

Something swept his cheek; he lifted his eyelids and beheld The Woman holding up a vast sheet of fabric. The little damasked designs of vines were vague, wavering; he complained of this to Yarra.

"It was because your thought of them wasn't explicit enough," she explained. "Get more practice." She arose. "Now I must go."

"But this cloth—it's a shawl, for you!" he cried, thrusting folds of the stuff at her.

"THANK YOU, my dear." She smiled sagely. "Let us see how long it is." She began to drag on the cloth, hand over hand. There seemed to be no end to the piece: Rogers was practically lost in the accumulated folds. Then Yarra held up the last of it, which wisped away into nothingness. He had forgotten to imagine any edge to the cloth!

"It was a very large piece," she commented, wryly smiling. "I'm afraid it's too large—even if weightless—for me to use, ever. But thank you, child. . . I can see that you're wondering

what to do with all that material: walk away and forget it. As soon as you've lost interest in it, it'll vanish—that's the way with things here. Now really, I must leave you." She touched his head affectionately and stepped into the mist.

Rogers stood gazing at the spot where she had been. Then the purple globe caught his eye. He wondered how it tasted, and reached for it—but it vanished in his hands: The Woman had "lost interest" in it. "The way with things here." When he looked for the green cloth it, too, had disappeared.

"IF THE LAW here is to create—then who makes all these changing illusions which harass me so?" he pondered. "It's malevolent and damnable!" He thrust his hands upward and shouted, "I want to behold whoever is in back of all this!"

Instantly manifestations overwhelmed him; there was a rocketing of sound, a crash of Cosmos shattering. Mad seas lurched in and out of shrieking blackness; whirling stars collided in blasts of brilliance; lightnings raced in chase after each

other; whole landscapes moved under Rogers in zigzag marches, lifting and dropping him, painfully knocking him about.

It rained ice, rocks, fire and strange yellow luminaries. Rogers was bounced on an endless sheet of stinking human flesh . . . he was drenched in slime . . . howling winds picked him up, spinning him through a place where strata of colored air boiled like a cauldron of rainbows. Falls of metal scraps thundered clangorously, and tangled plants of flexible grass grew to monstrous size and exploded. Rogers was stifling in an atmosphere of struggling wet worms . . .

All this in the space of ten seconds, so many things—some so inexplicable—that he could hardly identify a thousandth of them.

HE WAS LYING on a mirror which faded into illimitable distance. Overhead was a purple sky and rapidly whirling garlands of yellow moons and stars. One of the stars slipped away from the others, drifted downward, augmenting with approach. It halted at

Rogers' side, and he recognized Shi-Voysieh.

Rogers asked, "Why must you make that sanctimonious signal at every new apparition which confronts you?"

"Because it is the handiwork of B'Kuth," the child said, making the respectful gesture. "We are fortunate to behold the work of The Man. Therefore we make the Motion of Admiration to tell Him so."

"You mean, all these alterations of the scenery are His doing?" Rogers asked.

Shi-Voysieh nodded. "He is ever transforming the old into the new."

"Listen," Rogers said, "I don't like being here at the mercy of a maniac. I want to get back to my own world, where things are comparatively coherent and tranquil. But how can I do it? Tell me how to get out of this nightmare—or take me back. You brought me here!"

The child eyed him dubiously.

"You will have to re-create your world," he said finally. Then— "But—ah! Don't you see," His eyebrows were lifted imploringly.

"What do you mean?" Rogers asked.

The child pointed down to the mirrored floor. Rogers gazed, saw his reflected self. Only—it was not himself, not as he was accustomed to seeing himself. It was like Shi-Voysieh, a red-clothed, shining-faced immature image!

"Shi-Voysieh!" he cried, clutching the child, who shrank out of his grasp. "But what does it mean?" He peered at the reflection.

"You really want to know? I'd like to tell..." The child leaned forward eagerly; Rogers motioned for him to proceed. "Yarra won't like my telling you—but"—as he performed the sacred signal—"I believe that, B'Kuth prefers you to know..."

"YOU WERE one of us, long ago. But you were more ambitious than we. B'Kuth, the Man, took delight in you, because of the complex things which you shaped. You were proud of His indulgence, and mocked the puny efforts of us others. You went apart from us and created a cosmos all your own out of the thought-

material which The Man has given us"—again the reverent rite—"the ether-energy which is manipulated by the impulses of our wills. You entered this cosmos of yours, forgetting us—and when we searched for you, though we found you, we could not make you remember us, or notice us in any particular. But Yarra said that one day you must remember, that you could not rival The Man"—performing the ritual—"with your inventions. But it seems that you could, or almost so, because you made it a law of your cosmos that your works would progress without need of stimulus. You called it evolution—creation, of course. And I, I despaired of your return, my brother!

"So I asked The Woman to let me bring you here, if I could, to remind you in case you had absolutely forgotten us. She didn't wish it, but at last she agreed, on the premise that we treat you as a stranger. If we were to tell you, she said, it was probable that you might take offense in your perversity, or refuse to believe—and since you had found your place more appealing than ours, you might

be frightened back into it, never to return to us again. Refuge—in your private universe—shunning the realities of B'Kuth—insanity! Afraid to face the fact of your existence here!”

“Shi-Voysieh!” Rogers cried, horrified, but the child had more to say.

“OUR-mother-Yarra further said that though you were brought back to this region and we could persuade you to destroy your cosmos by forgetting it, still we could not prevent you from rebuilding it.”

“Shi-Voysieh, there's a flaw in what you say,” Rogers objected. “How can a man make something without having a model to go by?”

“You mean, what does a creator use as a foundation—as an inspiration? Why, he works like any artist: he obtains material from what is around him and enlarges upon it. And B'Kuth gave us the original material on which we have elaborated!” In his fervor he forgot to make the sacred sign.

“But then it's a useless game.

No purpose at all,” Rogers mused, “because to *create* you must make a thing which has never existed before in any wise, and you can't do that. You can only embroider what you've experienced. It's impossible for anyone to conceive something which he has not experienced except in terms of what he has experienced. And that's not creating at all! Merely rearranging facts into a new pattern!”

“But—then what of B'Kuth?” Shi-Voysieh trembled as he gestured reverently.

“He too is limited by His own law. He cannot make what is not potentially within Him. And therefore this so-called ‘creating’ of His is only a silly game to while away eternities—the fantasies of a lost and frightened child in the dark, babbling gibberish as it pretends that it is not alone.

“B'Kuth is only a fool like you and me, building dreams from remembered experiences, rearranging old patterns into new. Who's to say where the original Pattern of Patterns came from—some super-universe of which B'Kuth was once an inhabitant...”

"STOP!" Shi-Voysieh screamed, fluttering several paces away. "Oh, I shouldn't have told you! But I had to know if you remembered us—and instead I find you insane, insane! To say such things! Quick—remake your worlds and depart to them, leaving us as we were before at peace! You frighten me..." He drifted a few feet above the mirror as though ready to take flight.

"Wait! Don't go! I'll try!" Rogers cried, and shut his eyes, striving to recall the home from which Shi-Voysieh had drawn him—but there was only a blur.

"It's Yarra's will, still holding you here," Shi-Voysieh murmured slowly. His voice was weighted with guilt. "She will punish me when she learns that I have told... I am afraid!

I could make myself a world and hide in it, but that would be insanity, fear of facts, and anyway, I'd want to return to my native place..." He sighed resignedly, then spoke with reproach: "As for you—you'd better wait here until Yarra returns, and tell her how things stand. Now goodbye—

I'll never want to see you again!"

With a curt nod, the child wriggled his shoulders, flirting his scarlet draperies, and flashed upward to the dancing stars. They gathered around him, flickering excitedly as though exchanging gossip of light, then scattered, leaving an absolutely blank sky. The purple deepened to murky brown... Rogers sat peering at his child's face in the mirror, like Narcissus.

FAR OFF, he beheld a phosphorescence gliding his way. As it neared him, he discerned that it was Yarra. Her radiance was wan, and the misty glory was ebbing; her hair was tangled wildly, and her white robe was soiled and rent.

"Ah, I've found you. I searched and searched, and my thought drew me here at last," she sighed; bending, she lifted him to her bosom. She swayed, evidently ill, and Rogers hung on to her in terror lest he fall. Her free hand brushed back a golden tress which had fallen athwart her face, and she bent her head over the man. "I release you, little one. Go back to

that world of yours," she whispered. "But—take me with you. I don't care whether it is madness. I can endure B'Kuth's tortures no longer."

"But B-Kuth! Will He allow it?" The Woman had neglected to make the reverent salute, and Rogers forgot it also.

"B'Kuth!" she sneered. "We aren't puppets, are we? Hasn't he given us the powers of thought and action?"

"He can follow us!"

"Perhaps. But it may be that once we are in your world, He will forget us." She was asking for suicide, Rogers knew; he was willing to risk anything to return to his own place.

She shook him impatiently as one might shake an offending kitten. "Quickly! Quickly!"

Unheeding, Rogers thought aloud, "Surely I can't have created—my world!" He was horribly perplexed, and Yarra realized that his mind must be at rest before he could begin to shape the haven which she hoped to reach; she allowed him to finish. "I—who have looked through a microscope with awe! I couldn't enjoy the forest's beauty if I knew I had

fashioned it—unless, of course, I were insane, as Shi-Voysieh claimed."

YARRA DROPPED him despairingly and fell sobbing into a huddle. Shaken by the tumble, Rogers, lurched to his feet; gently he patted The Woman's smooth shoulders. Then he concentrated on the forest near his home; he closed his eyes, imagined its murmuring. But it was a dim, blurred sound. It must become louder, if it were to seem real—there, that was better—but louder still, until it was all around him. The trees shedding their pappy foliage; the drifting crumpled leaves; night, with stars overhead... Yes, it was very real...

Yarra's hand fettered his wrist; he opened his eyes. They were out of B'Kuth's domain and back in the autumn woods.

There was peace on The Woman's tired face as she struggled erect and they plodded through the brush toward Rogers' dwelling.

"We're safe now," she exulted. Something of her glory had returned to her.

Rogers pondered, "There

may be other laws than just B'Kuth's. What we call Substance here has been conceived as being composed of variations of a primal force. But it doesn't indicate that there is only one such force: there may be millions—each with its own set of laws—dwelling harmoniously side by side like the colors in the spectrum, perhaps congruently. But if these forces are each distinct from the others, how could I, the creature of one, leave my controlling vibration and enter another—since if the forces were interpermeable, they'd have blended long ago. Well, perhaps one can enter alien vibration but not become part of it, merely observe it imperfectly because of senses governed by a set of differing laws . . . my head's whirling. . . a flaw of one force in the enveloping ether of another. "

Yarra was not attending his words; she stood still, peering up at the stars in the sky, her hands crossed on her breast.

"Like my children—Shi-Voy-sieh," she whispered.

WAS IT HER nostalgia which dragged her back? Or the work of B'Kuth? Rog-

ers heard a little rush of wind. Like a candle flame in a draught, Yarra's nimbus flickered, and she dissolved into the night. There were only rustling trees beside Rogers. . .

He found the path which led to his house, and stumbled inside, with many backward looks. There was no trace of The Woman.

Had Yarra deserted him out of loneliness for her children? Or had B'Kuth snatched her back? Perhaps The Woman was only B'Kuth's thought, and He had been playing a jest on Rogers.

Suddenly Rogers knew—

For he was—he could be no other than—The Man! And Yarra, the children, everything of which he was at all conscious . . . only dreams in the theatre of his brain—a theatre where he was an actor as well as spectator.

Outside the wind howled ominously. He recognized it for what it really was.

"Only my imagination," he said scornfully.

The howling obediently stopped.

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THE LAST WORD



SEVERAL of you called attention to the blunder on the January cover, and we knock the editorial noggin against the wall between pourings of ashes on the head with one hand, and scratching beneath the sackcloth with the other. Of course Saturn (or anything resembling Saturn) shouldn't have been there, and we meant to dip an indignant brush into black ink and remove the offense. What happened then? We forgot to do it, and thereafter utterly and disasterously failed to notice that it had not been done!

Inside the cover, you rated the issue this way:

1. Once In A Blue Moon (Knight, N. L.)	0.92
2. The Coffin Ship (Wesley)	1.91
3. Puritan Planet (Emshwiller, C.)	2.75
4. Day of the Glacier (Lafferty)	3.28

My feeling when I first read the Emshwiller tale was that it would receive extreme reactions, would be voted either first or last place—with an occasional "A" or "X" thrown in. With the exception of one voter who put it in second place, my feeling turned out to be right.

And this is my answer to those who write in about a story which they've rated "X" or last place and ask whynell I ran it. Sometimes (not always) it's simply because I had the feeling that some would like it *very much* while others despise it. Being even farther from omniscience than righteousness, I couldn't estimate in advance whether the positive votes would exceed the negative ones (and in some instances, the story was one which I myself would not have placed in either first or last place—but just had the feeling that readers would.)

I take the chance when the story is one which interests me. After all, even though he knows he's not infallible, an editor

has to operate on the assumption that he's usually right and that his readers, in general, will like what he likes, or what he considers good even if he himself may not like it too much. On the other hand, when a certain *type* of story consistently brings forth negative reactions, then he has to assume that his own liking for the next example of the type ought to be put aside—because the editor isn't putting a magazine out for his own enjoyment alone. And some of you who disliked "Puritan Planet" were among those who applauded the last story I ran which brought forth similar reactions of extreme favor or disfavor.

ONE READER PLEASED...

Dear RAWL:

Another letter from an SF fan of many years standing. May I say a word about the field of SF first? I firmly believe in the future of it — that it is going to continue to be published in more or less quantity as long as there remain people with curiosity and imagination and as long as there are left answers to the question, "What if. .?"

It is my opinion that SF has not found itself in the field of literature. In the same publication are to be found the best and the worst examples of this difficult art of writing. Though I don't remember it, there must have been a time in the history of other specialized

fields of writing, such as the detective story and the western, when this was true—before there was time to develop a group of high-grade writers—for, let's face it, SF requires exactly the same writing talent that any other field does. A poor story is a poor story, no matter what its subject.

Like the detective story and the western, there are inevitably going to be cheap or juvenile forms of SF and there is going to be a market for it. However, this is going to do nothing for the genre. What serious readers want, and surely what publishers want, too, is to see the quality of SF writing rise to the point where it is given serious consideration by critics of literature, and possibly to the point where a Pres-

ident might confess he reads it for relaxation or enjoyment.

Now the point at issue, I suppose, is what constitutes serious SF. Is there a "right" and "wrong" here? I think so. I feel that there should be a sharp distinction between SF and fantasy. I don't feel, and I'm sure you don't either, that a meeting of a coven of witches can properly be called SF. It shouldn't be unreasonable to expect that SF should contain some science, in fact it would seem essential that the story should be so constituted that it couldn't exist at all without the science. My personal opinion is that the science in the story should not violate *known* physical laws, unless the author postulates a new and hitherto unknown concept of them. If a new science is mentioned, it should be plausible. You see, this wouldn't bar time travel, so long as the author presents an explanation that we couldn't clearly demonstrate to be wrong. It would be unreasonable to require the writer to submit the story to a panel of scientists for approval, so a wide latitude of tolerance is indicated.

It should be pointed out that the science need not be *physical* science; it could be social, mental, or even theological. This is an important point. Many good stories have no gadgets in them.

Now to the Nov. 1959 issue: "The Hunted Ones", by Mack Reynolds was especially good and should have been expanded into greater length. What kind of science here? Xenological?

"The Impossible Intelligence", by Silverberg. Not too terribly bad, but there was no attempt to make a personality out of the "intelligence" with whom to sympathize.

"Luck, Inc.", by Jim Harmon. Fuzzy sort of thing; needed a lot of rewriting.

"No Star Shall Fall", by Morley. Nothing at all.

"The Great Mutation", by Powell. Far too much to swallow. Since parthogenesis always occurs with females, at least among the higher life forms, this was too much to take and consequently wasn't funny.

"A Little Knowledge", by Charles V. De Vet. I thought this was a very good story.

Science: both sociology and ecology.

"For Sale — Super Ears" by Louise Hodgson. This was a silly story and I can't see why you printed it. The "science" was the rankest of nonsense, the plot was puerile, and the characters were kindergarteners. I will wager that no human being in a similar economic situation could have said one sentence like those in this foolish thing.

Epilogue: Like many readers, I buy all the SF on the newsstands—magazines and paperbacks. Consequently, I read a lot of trash, but on the other hand, I find a lot of good stories. In my possibly uncharitable evaluation of the Nov. issue, the average was probably not below par for the course, so you might say that, on the whole, this letter is a complimentary one. In any case, I am going to keep on buying SFS. What more can you ask?

(Mr.) F. W. Zwicky,
1602 Fifth Ave.,
Rockford, Illinois

PS: I realize that the number of active and voluble fans is relatively small, so that it

may not be good publishing business to devote much space to their activities. However, they do buy magazines consistently and they do much to convert readers to SF. So possibly it would not be asking too much to suggest that you merely mention the fact that fan organizations do exist, and how they can be reached. And maybe that their major activity is correspondence among themselves.

I'm sure you already know that the largest such organization in this country is the National Fantasy Fan Federation, and that its President is Ralph M. Holland, 2520 4th St., Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. The next largest is the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club. Its President is Seth Johnson, 339 Stiles St., Vaux Hall, New Jersey.

The pleasure of receiving a thoughtful letter like this, Mr. Zwicky, was marred by the fact that you typed it on both sides of the sheet, and it was several months before I could find the time to retype it, double-space, using only one side of the sheet. In fact, this department contains several letters which I had to re-

type—and this accounts for the fact that some of them were held up. (One was handwritten, but I don't mind the extra work so much when I know that the reader didn't have a typewriter—it's the re-typing which could have been avoided that is irritating.) So PLEASE all of you! I *want* to run your letters, but circumstances have changed to the point where I can't submit letters typed single space to the printer—or letters typed on both sides of the sheet. And the extra time for retyping comes very rarely now.

In any periodical whatever you are likely to find what you consider among the best and among the worst examples of whatever type of material the magazine uses. The reason for this—outside of editorial fallibility—is that certain amounts of blank paper have to be filled up by specified times and any editor will have to settle, at times, not for the best but for what he considers the least undesirable. I have yet to talk to a fellow-editor who did not bemoan some of the material he had to run, irrespective of his magazine's economic health.

"A poor story is a poor story" says something with which we can all agree, in a sense—but the phrase doesn't really tell us anything useful. Is poor story A "poor" in relation to a given reader's likes? "Poor story A" may be very good by generally accepted standards for a "good" story, or it may be "poor" by such standards, yet very well received by the majority of readers insofar as they give their testimony. In my own program of re-reading science fiction of yesteryear (I'm still in 1930) it is interesting to note the number of poor stories (by the standards of what constitutes a good story) which I and other readers considered wonderfully good at the time.

What might be an individual's standards for considering story A "good" or "poor"? (We'll forget for the moment about how good or how poor.) Well, I think that the very first requirement for "good" is that it sustains reader A's interest, just reading along. This is the fundamental of entertainment value. Now if reader A reads science fiction for entertainment value *and nothing else*, then he will be consistently

satisfied by a rather low grade of science fiction.

If reader B demands *in addition to* entertainment value, elements in an SF story which will stimulate him to scientific thinking or speculation (using the term "scientific" as broadly as possible) then a great deal of fiction over which reader A enthuses will not satisfy reader B.

And if reader C, in addition to entertainment value and stimulation to scientific speculation, demands those elements in fiction which make him think and feel in terms of the human situation (character delineation, etc.) then he won't be satisfied by many stories which please readers A and B mightily. The Burroughs stories are splendid in terms of reader A's requirements; the Lensman stories are excellent in terms of reader B's requirements—but neither will go down in reader C's list of worthwhile science fiction, although he may find them both entertaining.

AND ANOTHER DIS- PLEASED

Dear RAWL:

Ratings for the Jan. '60 *SFS*:

1. "Once In a Blue Moon", Norman L. Knight. A pretty good story, not Knight's best but the best in the ish.
2. "The Coffin Ship", Bill Wesley X.
3. "Puritan Planet", Carol Emshwiller X.
4. "Day of the Glacier", R. A. Lafferty X.

A rather poor ish for *SFS*. The best story was resurrected from the Aug. '42 *Future*. An editor, no matter how good his taste, can only print what is received. You must have had some real stinkers come in lately.

On the credit side you have the world's third best sf mag in this fan's opinion. First place goes to *ASF*, second to *New Worlds*. There is an air of respecting the subject matter about the mag which is lacking in some of your competitors.

Your editorial brings to mind the essence of some friend's arguments, "It is good, therefore it can't be sf." Examples of this sort of thinking are "1948", "Man's Mortality", etc. These are written by outsiders and therefore the author isn't identified with 'those horrid pulp writers'. Phil Dick has complained

about some of the big publishers accepting his mainstream novels until they find out he has a reputation in sf. Your advice to forget the entire matter is fine up to a point. Who is to define literature? Some of mainstream's highly praised works are to me just so much trash. A great deal of sf is also. Sf is condemned by such people as Barron on the basis of sampling an unrepresentative portion and then condemning the whole. Mainstream literature could be condemned on the same basis.

On the subject of fan support for *SFS* why should the fans support you. How many fans read *SFS*? Quite a few, perhaps but still probably not as many as read some of the others. With the dropping of Knight's book reviews, Madle's fan column and occasionally the lettercol why write in?

You've now indicated that if sufficient letters come in, the fans will have a dept. again. So this letter is being written. As long as there is a goal to be gained by helping out I'll keep writing. As far as prozines go perhaps 2 letters/year/prozine are written. There just isn't

enough time to keep the U. S. Air Force happy, keep up with fandom, other interests and keep the prozines supplied with letters also.

As Art Wison says put the lettercol in micro type as did the prozines of yesteryear. Since the material is free Columbia can have no objections to doubling or tripling the words on a page.

To regress back to my letter published a few issues back there is an oversight in the listing. George Allan England's "The Nebula of Death" was another unfinished serial in *Marvel Tales*.

Also, a copy of *New Frontiers* is being sent to your home address. Hope you enjoy the material. If you care to contribute payment is at the rate of 0.6c/word on acceptance.

Since you seem to be Michael Sherman are you also Peter Michael Sherman?

Apologies for the poor composition but then I keep making the excuse there is insufficient time to polish up a letter.

Norm Metcalf,
P. O. Box 35,
Lowry AFB, Colorado

The reason why the letter column isn't in 8 pt. type is that the printers inform us that they do not have this type on the linos any more, and that such material has to be hand-set. This takes extra time, and anything more than a rather small "minimum" runs up the costs. Conclusion—unfeasible for now.

Yes, Michael Sherman is the same as Peter Michael Sherman. After one appearance with full name, it was felt that dropping the initial appellation made the monicker less unwieldy. Translation: I thought it looked better.

Thanks very much for the copy of *New Frontiers*. There are far too few literary fan publications, by which I mean publications which attempt to give science fiction and fantasy 'serious attention as literature, and run articles by persons who have some qualification to speak on the subject. The essay by Mark Clifton is well worth the price of the magazine alone, and—as I hope you will see elsewhere in this issue—helped to clarify my own thoughts in relation to an editorial.

... BUT WE HOPE THAT
MORE ARE PLEASED!

Dear Mr. Lowndes

I really like the January 1960 *Science Fiction Stories*. "Once In A Blue Moon", has enough dimensions to create some feeling of reality. "Coffin Ship", brings out a moral problem which is settled on a level quite above the usual rat-race treatment. "The Day of the Glacier", had some slight interest, though I felt it was obviously propaganda in the sense of cheering for our side in a somewhat fatuous manner. Perhaps that is too severe, since I suppose the author intended it to be taken with a light heart. I think that "Puritan Planet", is too much of a logical construction without any illusion of reality. If it is intended to have anything to do with the Puritans of New England, it is really a misrepresentation, in my judgement — at least in view of the so-called "Log of the Mayflower."

I wish you were in a position to spend more money on *Science Fiction Stories*. This is the only science fiction magazine to which I am subscribing at present. Of those outstanding for literary quality, one has an editor who loves to flirt with black

magic; apparently broadminded enough to give serious consideration to superstition, he does not seem to have ever seriously considered, even as a hypothesis, that the Christian tradition is correct in forbidding us to fraternize with fallen angels. Another, not restricted to science fiction alone, has wonderful covers, but when one gets inside, all too often one finds one or the other of two insults to the reader. Either million-dollar gifts of literary expression are employed in broadcasting the ideas of nasty little vermin who infest dictionaries in the hope

of finding printable equivalents for the four-letter words habitually employed by their spiritual kinfolk, or we find cleverly contrived attacks on religion by authors who are sufficiently learned to combine enough truth with their lies so as to deceive the half-educated.

Don't think for a moment that I want prettified fiction. I can enjoy very strong presentations of reality, if truth is respected. Such works as Manzoni's "The Betrothed" or even the great trilogy of Sigrid Undset tell the bad with the

[Turn Page]

thrilling northwest novelet

A railroad was needed in the Selkirk — so badly needed that an intelligent man like Pilny Graham could be deceived by a transparent swindle. For Constable Clive Redmond could see at a glance that Duane's layout was nothing but bluff — that his crew had accomplished nothing and that he was ready to pull out, with all the money that had been invested.

THE PLUNDERERS

by Elton Webster

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good, and I respect the authors for their honesty. The stories that disgust me are those which start out like objective studies of the religious life, but which gradually lead up to some ghastly misrepresentation calculated to deceive the half-educated. These things are not only disgusting; they are boring, because, though the variety of good fruit is amazing, rot is rot wherever we find it. So, even in the lowest company, I find real interest in the astonishing traces of positive goodness which stand out like islands in a ocean of negativism and destruction. I often think that Shakespeare missed an opportunity when he assigned the lines, "How far that little candle sheds his beams! Thus shines a good deed in a naughty world!" to a character in the "Merchant of Venice". How much more forceful and true to life if he had given it to Lady Macbeth in the mad scene!

The reason I am interested in your work is that I subscribe to the principle that "a little bit of something beats nothing every time", and I feel that you are working in a positive

direction. If we would learn to give the Lord credit for certain virtues which we like to think we have, we could act much more intelligently in His sight. We are very ready, perhaps, to credit Him with omnipotence and perhaps even omniscience, but do we sufficiently appreciate His benevolence and even good taste? I think that we are so habituated to thinking of the sufferings of Job, that we fail to notice how often the Lord will support some little effort which is aimed in a positive direction. We have to be prepared for troubles, but it is a serious error to think that everything always goes wrong with us when we try to serve God. Of course, Finagle's laws seem to be quite true, when we try to do things *on our own*.

Alan C. Bates,
Room 202, 5442 S. Harper,
Chicago 15, Illinois

It is well to beware of judging motives, for we can never be sure about what degree of deliberation lies behind what looks like a lie to us. Someone depicts religion in a way which falsifies it, or which would indeed deceive the half-educated—but

unless we have absolute proof of this intention then we really do not know whether the *intent to deceive* was really there.

What is a "lie"? It is a falsehood which the perpetrator *knew or believed* to be false, but nevertheless stated as truth, with the intent to deceive. All fiction is falsehood in that it is not a true account of what really happened in the real world; but fictioneers are not liars—they do not intend or expect to believe. Suppose I say something which you know is false, but I myself believe it true; then I am mistaken, but

I am not lying. Or I may say something which you know is false, but I—while not necessarily believing it to be absolute truth—am not aware of it as a falsehood, but just as a possibility, or an amusing story, etc. In any event, in this instance, my intent wasn't to present what I *knew* to be false as *truth*—therefore, however false the statement may be, I wasn't lying, because deceit was not my purpose.

On the other hand, if I say something which is actually true, but which *I* believe to be false, and say with intent

[Turn Page]

Norvell had killed his first man immediately after being released from the penitentiary, and he knew that this would not be his last killing. But so long as he could hold a gun, they'd never take him back to prison, or get a rope around his neck . . .

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by Olin Grant

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to deceive, then I'm a liar! The fact that I happened to tell the truth is irrelevant in this instance.

So the charge upon us "Judge not, lest ye be judged", while not barring us from exposing falsehood, should deter us from calling the tellers of falsehood liars unless we know for sure that *they knew the truth in the matter and are deliberately falsifying with the intent to deceive*. Most accusations of "liar" are incorrect because one or more of the elements in the definition do not apply. Particularly is this likely to be true where you come across misrepresentations of religion in science fiction. In most instances, the author considers all religion as more or less equally false or equally nonsensical—so that he does not see that he is doing any damage to truth in manipulating theology to suit his own purposes in a story.

From what we know about magic (black magic as opposed to stage tricks) if you go through the right formulae and actions, you'll get the results prescribed. To someone whose fundamental orientation is "does it work?" (in a tangible and immediate

sense) evidence that this or that phase of psionics (as some black magic is called) really "works" settles the question. There is a good deal of foundation for the contention that the present age is really a much more superstitious one than, say, the 13th Century.

Don't blame the author for the title, "Puritan Planet". Carol Emshwiller called the story, "Don't Say Damn". Title was changed because I wanted to list it on the cover—but "Don't Say Damn" hardly suggests science fiction.

After all, that band of zealous dissenters and separatists from the Church of England who migrated to American shores were not, and are not, the only puritans in history. The Romanists have had their puritan element—some heretical, some not. Among the infidel, the Moslems have had puritan sects. In Israel, there were the Pharisees; and from what we learn from the Dead Sea scrolls, the Essenes seem to have been a puritan group. Then there are the original epicureans—far different from what the term implies today; some of the gnostic

groups, etc. What I mean is that I believe the term can generally refer to any group which takes what we call a "puritanical" attitude toward the particular religious beliefs its original culture holds, and withdraws from it in order to practice its own tenets. The withdrawal need not be actual physical separation, although this may be the case more often than not.

CHALLENGE

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I should like to discuss briefly with you a trend of thought that has annoyed me for years. That is the lack of imagination displayed by most of the various authors of Time Travel stories.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to state for the record that I feel quite competent to make such a comment. I am, and have been for years, a qualified historian. It is my constant employment to reconstruct the past. My

[Turn Page]

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field is the American Civil War, and its immediate background. Like many historians, I suppose that I live more in the past than I do in the present. However, I do have a fertile imagination.

For many years, I have been an avid reader of Science Fiction stories for entertainment, as well as for "Escapism". Naturally, due to my profession, the Time Travel stories have drawn my greatest interest. But, it occurs to me that the majority of the writers seem to "grind out" their stories, and to fail utterly to provide them with the one item that would lift them out of the mediocre class. **REALISM.** Their time-travelers constantly make their voyages in some kind of a ma-

chine that, should the incident have actually occurred, would stand out in recorded history like the proverbial "sore thumb". Why do they do it? Now, there are no historically recorded incidents of visitations in the past by persons utilizing aircraft. Nor are there any records of "shimmering bubbles" recorded by the scribes of Julius Caesar in Gaul. And, certainly, no representative of Her Majesty's Government ever wrote that the sleep of Queen Victoria was ever disturbed by some type of weird machine hovering over Windsor Castle!

However, Mr. Lowndes, there are literally dozens of incidents that have occurred, and are recorded, that defy

[Turn Page]

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an explanation! And, just for the record, I would like to say that in every instance, the same type of "vehicle" could have been employed by some time-traveler to account for them! Weird, isn't it?

But, the writers have as yet to discover either the incidents OR the vehicle. Again, why?

I am most curious as to what sort of Editorial/Reader comment a letter such as this would bring. Hence, the odd means of transmission. I trust that you will understand.

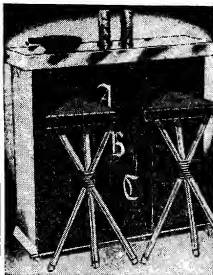
I will now withdraw to the year 1862, where I will remain until the next issue of *Science Fiction Stories*.

*William Frayne Amann,
General Delivery,
Gettysburg, Penna.*

This is what I call a tantalizing letter. Not knowing what incidents you're referring to, I can't comment—but I gather that you're trying to stimulate some readers, who may have some inkling of what you have in mind, to writing in. I'm all for that!

**OH—THOSE SPANNER-
HEFTERS**

[Turn to Page 124]



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Dear RWL:

As you have probably noticed from my previous letters, I would like to see the "Parodies Tossed" department revived. So far as the literal interpretation of the word parody in the title is concerned, what could follow closer to the original than "You're a better man than I am, Hunka Tin."

But if we must be concerned with minor technicalities, such as the question of non-sibilant hissing, it seems to me we are straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel, so long as we preserve the man who picks up a heavy spanner. I have worked on a number of heavy construction jobs, including five of the St. Lawrence Sea-

[Turn to Page 126]



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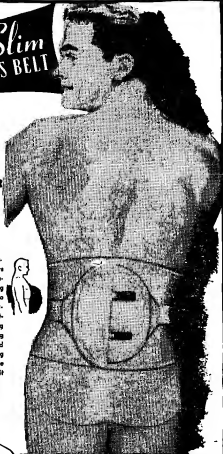
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way and Power Project jobs (2 dams, 2 locks, and Massena Intake,) and only once have I ever seen a spanner wrench in use. That one weighed about 8 oz. and was about 7 in. long. It was used in the installation and maintenance of one particular type of lighting fixture; and because a spanner is a special purpose tool, which no workman would be expected to carry, the wrench was supplied by the manufacturer of the fixtures.

There is a tandem bicycle, built for three, in the city of Portland, but it is hardly the first thing I would think of if I wanted to get somewhere fast. It exists, and would be faster than walking, but it would hardly be likely to be the first

THE LAST WORD

means of transportation available. Likewise there are heavy spanner wrenches, no doubt, but they are about as common as triple tandem bikes. A laborer might arm himself with a shovel or pick; a carpenter with a claw hammer or pinch bar; a plumber or steamfitter with a pipe wrench, monkey wrench, crescent wrench, or piece of pipe; an electrician with a pipe wrench, length of conduit, screwdriver, or hammer; an ironworker with a spud wrench; a welder with a stinger or chipping hammer. Given time to make a second choice they would probably all end up with pipes, pinch-bars, or 2x4's, many with claw hammers in the other hand.

[Turn Page]



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In this introductory offer you get **TOP RADIO GUITARIST** ND SALE's famous 88 page recent system worth \$2.75 which positively teaches you to play a beautiful song the first day and any song by ear or note in seven days! Contains 52 photos, 57 finger placing charts, etc. Shows how to tune, keep time, build chords, bass runs, dance chords, swing, etc., plus 110 popular and western songs, words and music; a \$1.00 Chord Finder of all the chords used in popular music; a \$3.00 Guitarist Book of Knowledge—**TOTAL VALUE \$7.00—ALL THREE for only \$2.00. SEND NO MONEY:** Just name and address, pay postman \$2.00 plus C. O. D. postage. (Or send \$3.00 with order and I pay postage.) Same Guarantee. (Sorry, no C. O. D. to APO, FPO or outside U. S. A. Canada and Foreign \$3.00 with order.)

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—until they try my method

Just One Trial Will Prove That I Make Every Fisherman's Dream Come True

I have no fishing tackle to sell. I make a good living out of my profession. But fishing is my hobby. And because of this

hobby, I discovered a way to get those giant bass—even in waters most fishermen say are *fished out*.

I don't spin, troll, cast or use other method you ever heard of. Yet, without live or prepared bait, I can come home with a string of 5 and 6 pound beauties while a man twenty feet away won't even get a strike. You can learn my method in a few minutes. It is legal in every state. All the equipment you need costs less than a dollar and you can get it in any local store.

The chances are no man who fishes your waters has ever used my method—or even heard of it. When you have tried it—just once—you'll realize what terrific bass fishing you've been missing.

Let me tell you about this method—and explain why I'm willing to let you try it for the whole fishing season without risking a single penny of your money. There is no charge for this information—now or any other time. But I guarantee that the facts I send you can get you started toward the greatest bass fishing you have ever known. Send me your name today—letter or postcard. You've got a real fishing thrill ahead of you. **Eric Y. Fare, Highland Park 37, Illinois.**



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Over 180
Air Cushioned
Styles — for
Men, Women,
Children

But even if there were two billion men involved, I would be surprised to see as many as two spanners.

But to get back to the subject of "Parodies Tossed," I am enclosing the manuscript of my version of Sheckley's "IMMORTALITY DELIVERED", which I hope you will see fit to publish.

But it would bring me even more pleasure, if the contents page of your next issue listed articles by Robert A. Madle and damon knight, and a straight science article.

This three-color logo with black and white illo on the cover doesn't look good at all. Why not alternate between full color and straight black and white,

[Turn to Page 130]



SKINNY

MEN ARE OFTEN ASHAMED TO STRIP FOR SPORTS OR FOR A SWIM AND GIRLS ARE NOT ALLURING AND DON'T HAVE EYE-CATCHING CURVES! CHILDREN WHO WON'T EAT AND ARE UNDERWEIGHT, OFTEN CALLED SKINNY!

Now at last More-Wate plan that puts firm, attractive pounds and inches on your body, chest, arms and legs.

GAIN MORE WEIGHT START GAINING WEIGHT IN 24 HOURS!

Amazing New Way developed by modern medical science to put on weight on lean bodies. Guaranteed to give you up to an extra pound a day! On your money back! Why should you dread going to parties and socials, simply because you look scrawny and apically? Why ever feel self-conscious about your body again? If you're underweight... or just a little on the thin side, due to family genetic, or bad dietary habits, you can put on up to a pound a day of attractive weight without exercise... dangerous drugs... or special diet... and more quickly, more easily than you ever dreamed possible... with MORE-WATE. MORE-WATE contains no dangerous drugs... you eat it like candy! Yet... if you were to have this same prescription compounded to your order, it would cost you thirty \$ in a mere. However, through this introductory offer, you can obtain 4-way MORE-WATE tablets... a full 30-day supply for only \$2.98 with an absolute money back guarantee! Yes, try MORE-WATE for TEN DAYS... and if not entirely delighted with weight gained, return the unused supply for full refund! You're nothing to lose... and weight to gain! Act now! Stop being the guy or the gal that everyone calls "Skinny." Stop being the guy or the gal who dreads summer and going to parties and socials because it means everyone will enjoy themselves and you won't. Don't be a wallflower, because you have a figure like a



broomstick! Gain more weight!

30-DAY
SUPPLY
ONLY

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We don't want
SKINNY
on our team!



The 4-way MORE-WATE tablets are unconditionally guaranteed to put on weight... or it doesn't cost you a penny! MORE-WATE is a delicious, full strength, 4-way tablet... that combines not just one... or two... but 4 of the most amazing aids for gaining weight known to medical science. MORE-WATE is not a liquid... not a powder. It's a delicious, pleasant-tasting tablet! It contains vitamin B-12... the amazing red vitamin doctors give many underweight patients in hospitals... It contains Iron that helps correct iron deficiency, anemia and builds rich red blood. It contains appetite-building vitamin B-1... and it contains potassium, easily assimilated salt, the missing ingredient that helps your body turn each of the food you eat into well rounded flesh instead of being wasted. That's the secret of putting on weight. Now you can help your food to add new pounds to your arms, chest, hips, thighs, and legs. Now you don't have to be skinny... or afraid to be seen socially and be teased of your figure! You must achieve the figure you want... or don't pay anything. Act now!

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Mail the coupon now! Test the amazing MORE-WATE tablet plan for 10 days at no expense. If after 10 days your friends, your mirror and you smile to tell you that you have gained weight and look better, you pay nothing!

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LET'S improve! Intestinal MORE-WATE PLAN, please, prepaid.

I, Send me Special 30-day money package for \$2.98. I understand that if I am not delighted with MORE-WATE and MORE-WATE PLAN I can return in 10 days for full purchase price refund.

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or perhaps red or green and white? *Future Science Fiction* sounds and looks better than FSF Stories. Let *Amazing* look like they are trying to copy the original *Science Fiction Stories* with Stories recently added to both titles, but don't imitate yourself.

*Bret Hooper,
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Portland 14, Oregon*

Thanks for the information on spanners, and I hope that this will serve to remedy the situation, just as H. C. Koenig's campaign against the

excessive use of the non-sibilant hiss eventually helped to diminish its use. You still see it (perhaps even in our pages once in a while) but not to the ridiculous extent that you saw it back in the 30's.

Need we say we enjoyed your version of the Sheckley novel? Well—just in case it's crowded out of this issue, perhaps we ought to say as much, so that readers can look for it in forthcoming issues if they do not see it on the contents page this time.

RAWL

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How many hard-earned dollars have you spent to save your hair? How many hair-tonics, gadgets, restorers, electrical devices, have you tried in the last few years - with no success? How many times after an unsuccessful hair-growing attempt have you sworn not to spend another cent on another hair treatment?

Yet, you buy the next product that comes on the market with hair-growing claims.

CAN YOU GROW HAIR?

Doctors who have spent a lifetime studying hair and hair growth have concluded that nothing now known can grow hair on a bald head. So, if you are bald, prepare to spend the rest of your life that way. Accept it philosophically and quit spending hard-earned dollars on hair growers.

If you can't grow hair—what can you do? Can you stop excessive hair loss? Can you save the hair you still have? Can you increase the life expectancy of your hair? Probably.

Please read every word in the rest of this statement carefully, since it may mean the difference to you between saving your hair and losing the rest of it to eventual BALDNESS.

HOW TO SAVE YOUR HAIR

Itchy scalp, hair loss, dandruff, very dry or oily scalp, are symptoms of the scalp disease called seborrhea. These scalp symptoms are often warnings of approaching baldness. Not every case of seborrhea results in baldness but doctors now know that men and women who have this scalp disease usually lose their hair.

Seborrhea is believed caused by three parasitic germ organisms (staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, microbacillus). These germs first infect the sebaceous glands and later spread to the hair follicles. The hair follicles atrophy, no longer can produce new hairs. The result is "thinning" hair and baldness.



DOUBLE MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

In seconds, Ward's Formula kills the three parasitic germ organisms retarding normal hair growth. This has been proven in scientific tests by a world-famous testing laboratory (copy of laboratory report sent on request). Ward's Formula removes infectious dandruff, stops scalp itch, brings hair-nourishing blood to the scalp, tends to normalize very dry or oily scalp. In brief Ward's Formula corrects the ugly symptoms of seborrhea, stops the hair loss it causes. Ward's Formula has been tried by more than 350,000 men and women on our famous Double Your-Money-Back Guarantee. Only 1.9% of these men and women were not helped by Ward's and asked for their double refund. This is truly an amazing performance. Treat your scalp with Ward's Formula. Try it at our risk. In only 10 days you must see and feel the marked improvement in your scalp and hair. Your dandruff must be gone. Your scalp itch must stop. Your hair must look thicker, more attractive, and alive. Your excessive hair loss must stop. You must be completely satisfied - in only 10 days - with the improved condition of your scalp and hair, or simply return the unused portion for Double Your Money Back. So why delay? Delay may cost your hair.

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Another scan
by
cape1736

